METALSMITH

volume 19
number 2

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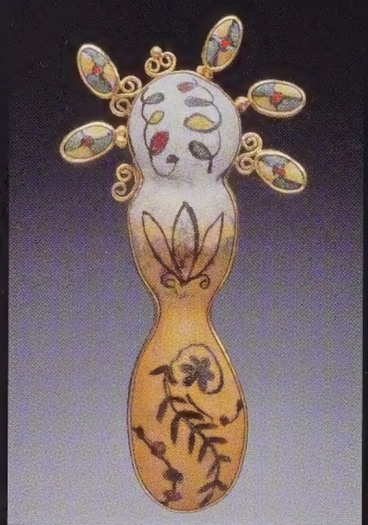

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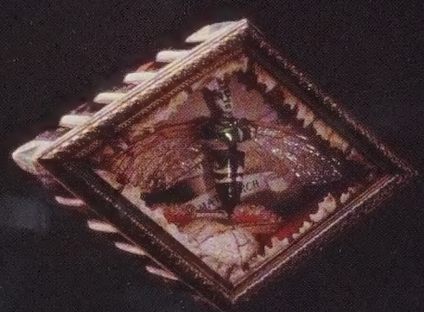

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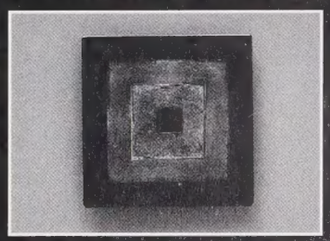

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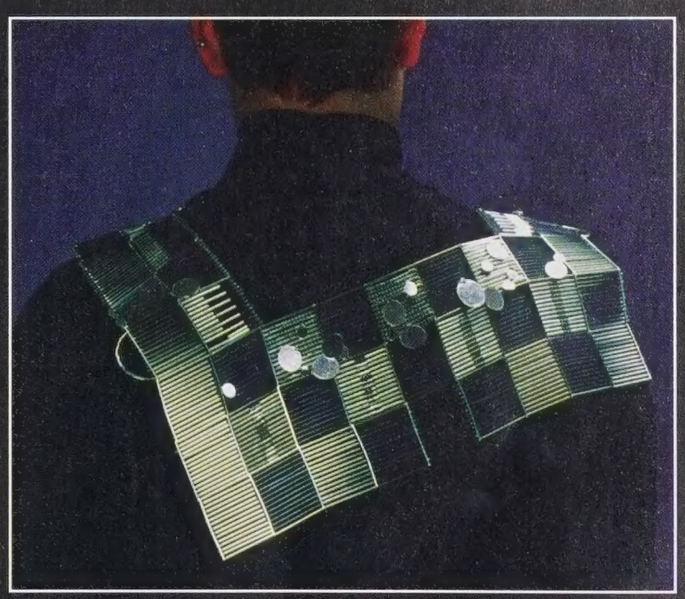

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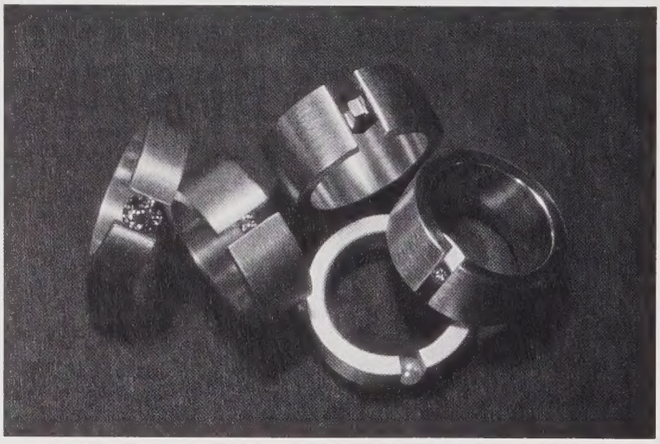

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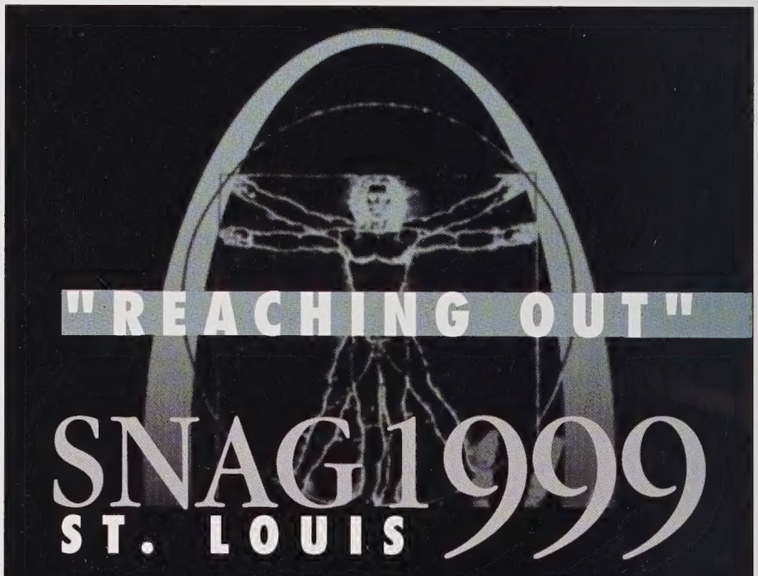

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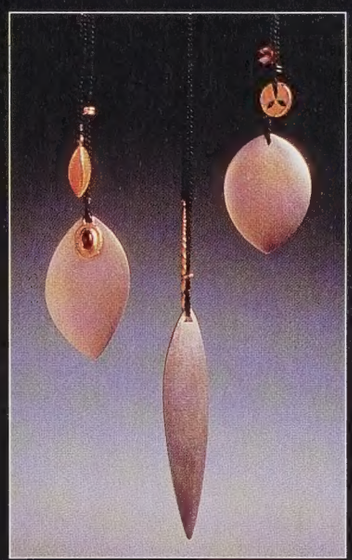

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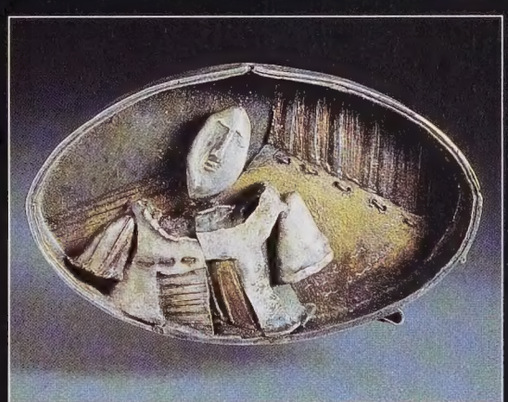

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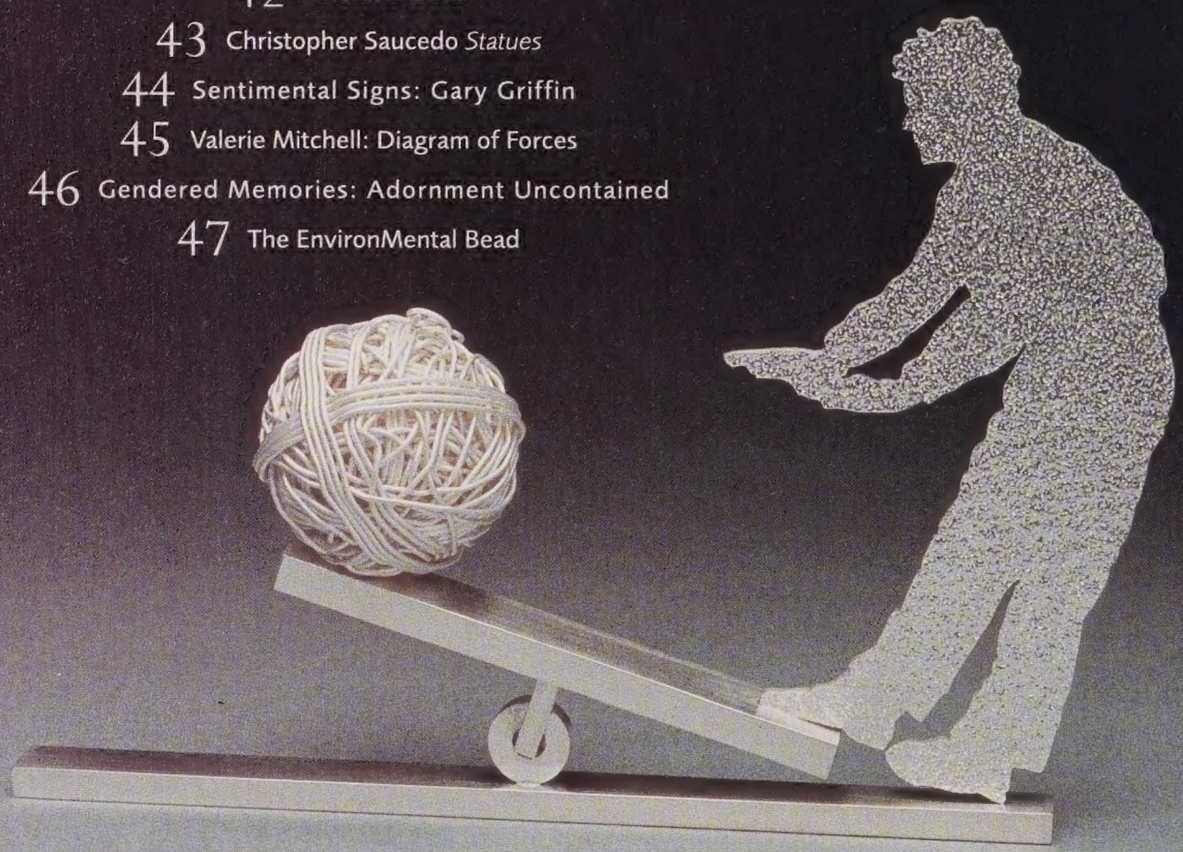
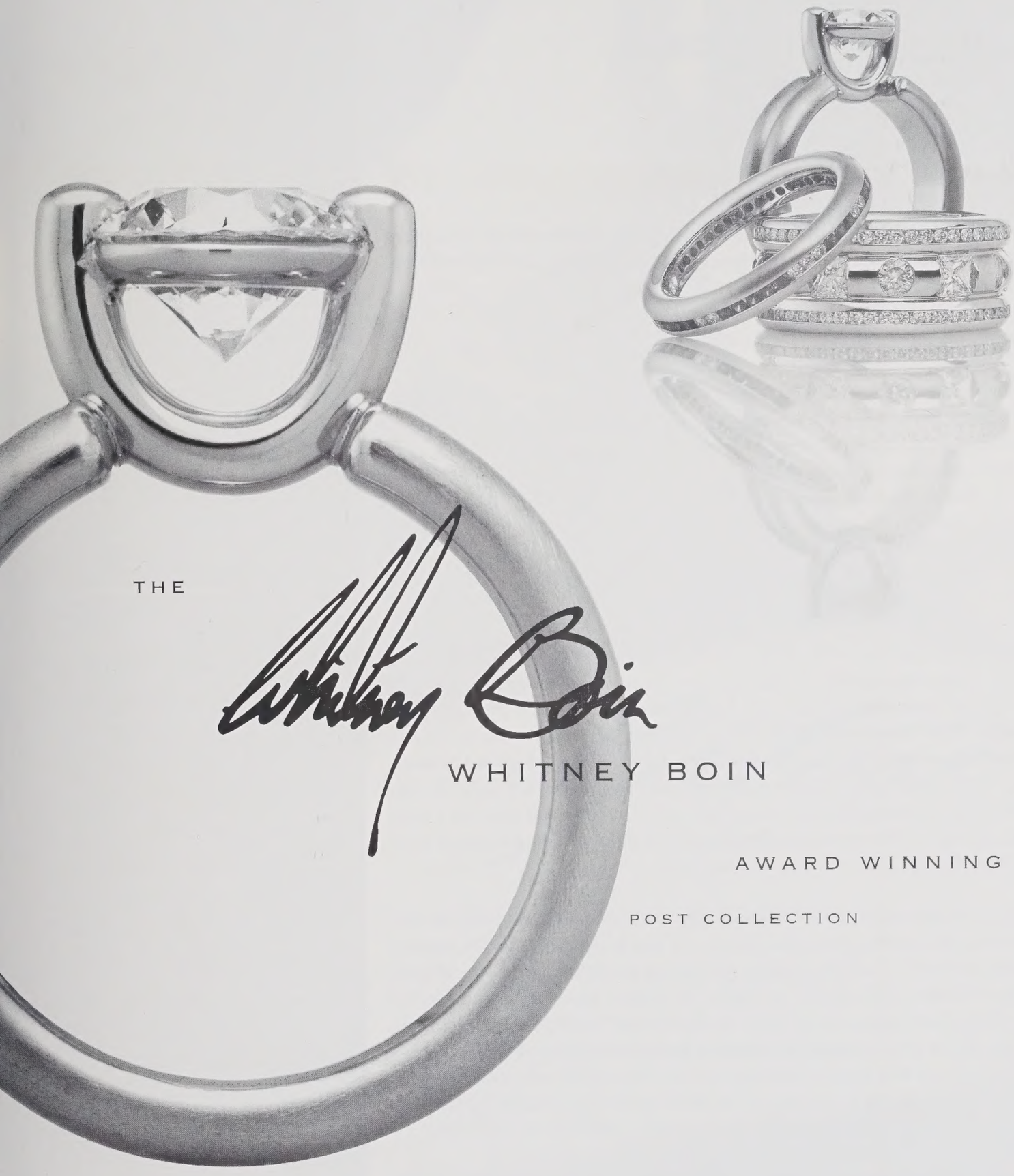
Christina Y. Smith
The Commitment,
silver
10 x 9 x 6"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha



above
Keith Lo Bue
The Hidden Room
(brooch detail), 1995
mahogany, doorknob rosette, glass, screws, lens, paper, engraving, yellow-jacket heads, text, soil

left
Christina Y. Smith
Balance Is Too Strenuous
(brooch)
silver
4 1/2 x 5 x 1"

below
Christine Clark
Warm Body, detail
(a site specific sculpture), 1997
steel, wool
4 x 7 x 15'



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FROM THE EDITOR

FRANK LEWIS **Recently I have juried a number of arts and crafts shows. The experience is both grueling and informative.** If I can offer artists and craftspeople any helpful advice gleaned from my experiences, I urge them to make sure that they have high quality, professionally presented slides of their works. But that is not what I want to write about.

Almost always I find that metalsmiths/jewelers display a higher degree of sheer craftsmanship than the artists in any other category. Despite the fact that when projected many slides present a greatly magnified image of a work, the technical aspects of most jewelry remains impressive. Having attended a number of SNAG conferences, this really does not surprise me. The predominance of vendor booths devoted to equipment and supplies; the conversations that I overhear concerning tips, techniques, methods, equipment, and processes; and the eagle-like eyes of people as they study each other's works are all consistent with a field that considers craft and technical virtuosity a significant part of its practice.

But unfortunately I have also witnessed an area that could use more attention. Certainly not all, but a surprising number of entries in jewelry are indistinguishable, one from another. Certain conventions, forms, and designs seem to have come from the same pattern book. When I first became interested in the field I often thought that my perceptions of this sameness was a product of unfamiliarity. I assumed that as I learned more the subtleties of individual designs would reveal themselves. But this has not been the case. One of the most frequent comments I hear from fellow jurors is that they don't really know how to judge jewelry because to them much (not all) of it looks the same. I never admit to them that I am often thinking the same thing.

As a teacher of art history I have some ideas as to why this is the case. In fields that demand technical virtuosity teaching often takes place in an almost apprenticeship like manner. The teacher has his/her students replicate a work using a particular number of techniques; thus it becomes fairly easy for the students to compare their work to its model and see where things need improvement. This is an effective way to inculcate skills and techniques. Secondly, in a field as technically demanding as metalsmithing, often the best way to teach and to learn is to create a situation in which the concern with innovation does not distract the students from focusing on the skills required to successfully execute a piece. It is thought that once skills become second nature, creativity can then follow.

These observations are not necessarily meant to be a negative critique. In an age of mass production it is quite possible that the value of a hand made, carefully crafted object is much more important to a customer and a producer than is an artist's individual expression and creativity. There is nothing wrong with finding value in skill and execution as opposed to innovation. It is, however, an issue that I have not heard discussed. And I would hate to think that jurors from outside our field might misinterpret what we are doing. Think about it. M

FCL

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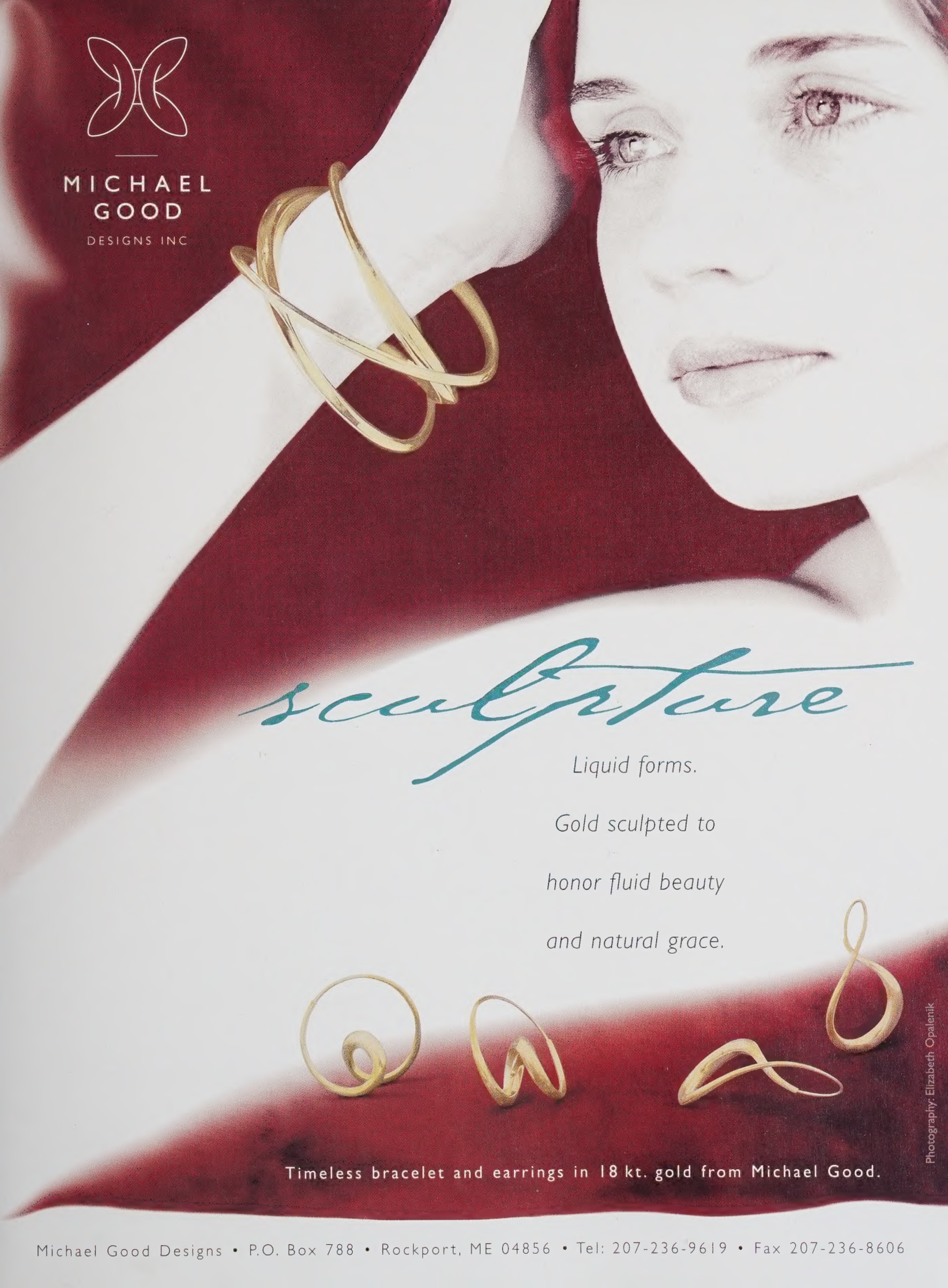

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It was Richard Reinhardt's nature to triumph, meeting illness in the last years of his life with persistence, pushing his ideas as a metalsmith to even greater resolution. When he died, notions about cones, interiors, light, and space still percolated in his mind and on his bench. He was making extraordinary work.

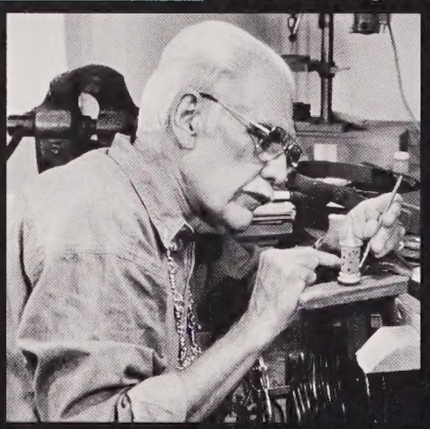
Richard H. Reinhardt

1921-1998 Professor Emeritus
The University of the Arts

Dick was born in Philadelphia and educated in the city's public schools; in his youth he smoked catalpa beans while painting pictures at the river docks. He knew metal first through his father, Elmer, who was a Mechanical Arts teacher and skilled tinsmith. Dick was encouraged to develop his talent with painting lessons and was ultimately awarded a scholarship to one of the founding schools of The University of the Arts–The Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Arts. He enrolled in Art Education and took a general crafts course taught by Virginia Cute, officially learning jewelry skills he had already acquired by sneaking into Douglas Gilchrist's night classes to make a ring for his sweetheart, Hazel Scott. School would have to wait, however, for World War II was underway and Dick could not in conscience continue. He became a patent draftsman for the Budd Company, married Hazel, enlisted in the Marines, went to Parris Island and started a family. At war's end, Dick found himself on Guam, an artist-turned-Drill Sergeant teaching mechanical drawing to soldiers waiting to be shipped home. When Dick returned to P.M.S.I.A., the school was bursting with G.I.s and in desperate need of teachers. Thus, he was pressed into service, simultaneously teaching while earning his degree at the institution that would anchor his life's work.

In 1948 Richard Reinhardt was among a handful of artists chosen to attend the Handy and Harmon workshops taught by Baron Erik Fleming. The next year he was privileged to return as Shop Assistant. Dick was determined to become a silversmith; he honed his craft through teaching and commissioned work. His wedding crowns were strongly influenced by Swedish instruction, while his more distinctly American hollowware was sought after by Philadelphia's young professionals. To support his growing family Dick's endeavors expanded to include conference tables and furniture for corporate office spaces. His business card read "Richard H. Reinhardt: Designer/Craftsman," and for several years he straddled both professional arenas. During the '60s he helped establish the Industrial Design and Craft Departments at school, while his reputation as a design educator took him to Japan and schools across the country. He was a most capable administrator, becoming Associate Dean of the Faculty and then Dean of the school, which had become The Philadelphia College of Art. These were the busy years, as he called them, rewarding in their own right, but not particularly productive for him as an artist. At home he focused on his family–making furniture, producing toys for his young grandchildren. And he continued to make jewelry for Hazel.

When Olaf Skoogfors died, Dick was challenged to return to the classroom. P.C.A. Metals had flourished under Olaf; now there was a hole in the studio closest to Dick's heart. Dick was intimate with material and process; he would devote himself to jewelry-making while re-immersing himself in teaching. In 1978 a sterling cuff bracelet stamped "Dick loves Hazel" caught Helen Drutt's eye, launching Dick into a decade of exhibitions and widespread critical acclaim. His patronage was largely centered in Philadelphia because of his gallery commitments to Helen and to Jane Korman at The Swan. Their friendship and support through the years combined to affirm Dick's significance as an American silversmith. He was prolific and highly skilled, beguiling the viewer with stunning displays of silver that seemed straightforward in jewelry application. Further investigation, however, revealed a complex and often confounding resolution of form. Reinhardt silver was made to be appreciated through intimacy and use. As he intended, it will be treasured from one generation to the next.



Dick's black Ford pick-up remains, boasting decals that proclaim membership in The Philadelphia Museum of Art, the United States Marine Corps, the NRA, and The University of the Arts. What a combustion of passion! Dick loved opera, cigars, a good book, guns, and America. He was generous, empathetic, demanding, and decisive. He was a leader and a teacher whose students reflect his mastery through their own creative work: Olaf Skoogfors, Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, Todd Noe, and Bob Oppecker among them. His work has been exhibited at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and resides in the collections of The Smithsonian Institution, The Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and The Philadelphia Museum of Art. As the American flag was folded at Dick Reinhardt's grave, one could not help but marvel at the richness of his life. M

Sharon Church

A catalogue documenting the retrospective exhibition, *RICHARD H. REINHARDT: Full Circle, A Legacy of Metalwork* is available through The Rosenwald Wolf Gallery, The University of the Arts, 320 South Broad Street, Philadelphia PA 19102.

above
Richard H. Reinhardt - working on his "Pomander" pendant, 1997
photo by William P. Daley

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RECENT SIGHTINGS

BRUCE METCALF

I visited Florence for the first time two summers ago. While the great paintings and sculptures were certainly interesting –some lived up to all the art historical hoopla, and some did not–spending time in Florence is never just a tour of great masterpieces. The city presents a totality of experience, of which the museums are only a part.

Florence has wonderful places to walk, once you get used to the traffic. There's a distinct texture and pace to the city. As my partner and I walked about, we noticed that the streets were full of art: carved ornaments on buildings; painted religious shrines at street corners; stone fountains in the middle of tiny squares. We discovered saints we never heard of before, humorous stone lions, and bundles of fruits in tin-glazed ceramic. All of this was, in effect, Florentine public art. Strolling through the city became an adventure: what peculiar thing would crop up around the next corner? I loved that sense of anticipation and surprise. I never knew what would happen next.

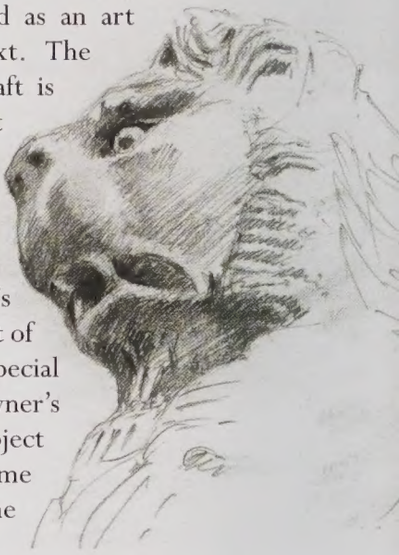
After spending time in the Uffizi and the Academia and the other treasure-houses of Renaissance art, it was clear that this street-level art was strictly second-rate. Second-rate as *Art*, that is, measured by the same yardstick that measures Leonardo and Michaelangelo. Most of the street decorations were tame and conventional. As individual objects, they were nothing special. Nothing to make it in the history books, nothing that a tourist would bother to photograph. Instead, all these ornaments and shrines and decorative fillips become part of a complex urban experience. They fit comfortably within the fabric of the city, and taken together, they added tremendously to the urban encounter.

Western aesthetics and art theories are devoted to singling out the *best*, whatever that means. All of our history books, and most of our discourse, are directed toward separating the good from the bad. The exact language changes, but the intent remains the same. One can say that art is "interesting," "heroic," "valid," or "politically correct," but each word suggests a hierarchy of better and worse. After being exposed to enough of this language, I think we become brainwashed into believing that only the best art is worthy of consideration.

For sure, standing before Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* was a great experience, just like all the authorities said it would be. But those authorities never mentioned how delightful the Florentine street would be, and how the experience of just walking through an ordinary neighborhood could be rich and exciting. All this second-rate stuff, all these sculptures and decorations of no historical consequence, added up to something that most art theory cannot account for. There I was, out on the street, having a great aesthetic experience where nobody ever predicted there was one to be had.

What does this have to do with craft? I think the craftworld is afflicted with the same "masterpiece mentality" that dominates the artworld. I couldn't count the number of times I have listened to my colleagues complain about another's work, in the most dismissive language. (I, too, am guilty of being a harsh critic.) In my experience, the most pervasive criticism is directed at low-end production craft, the kinds of things that are sold for modest prices at local craft fairs. The implication is that this kind of work is beneath consideration, so derivative, or so poorly made, or so poorly designed that it should all be thrown away, right now. And certainly, compared one-on-one to the *best* craftwork available, much low-end craft doesn't look too good.

Such criticisms are usually rooted in the assumption that each item should be considered as an art object, isolated from any context. The problem is that, after a piece of craft is purchased, it's placed in a context that no observer can predict. Just as a decorative sculpture on a building in Florence becomes part of a much larger streetscape, most craft objects are incorporated into someone's domestic life. The object becomes part of an interior, or it gets taken out for special occasions, or it gets worn on the owner's body. Whatever the case, the craft object becomes part of an ensemble. The home or the body are analogous to the Florentine street: it could be intimate, surprising, elegant, or luxurious, depending on the whole environment. Until the object finds its place in its new owner's personal life, nobody can tell how wonderful or dismal the final result will be.



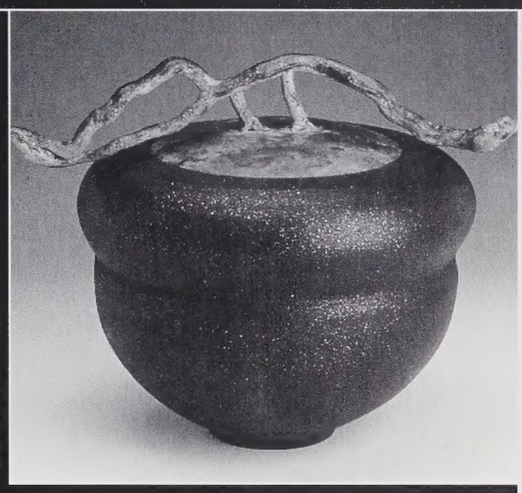
For sure, standing before Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* was a great experience, just like all the authorities said it would be. But those authorities never mentioned how delightful the Florentine street would be, and how the experience of just walking through an ordinary neighborhood could be rich and exciting.

In other words, all those objects that are frequently dismissed as being aesthetically inadequate–second-rate–might be quite successful in the home, or on the body. And I think that's the point of most craft objects: in the real world, they are never seen in isolation. Thousands of people use craft to construct their living environments, and thus their lives. These constructions are never composed of masterpieces. Each person's living space is a collage of found objects, an accumulation of bits and pieces in which craft objects often serve as the focal point. And even if the craft objects themselves are not masterpieces, they exert an influence on all the mass-produced items around them. What the exact influence might be, nobody can predict. But given some sensitivity and ingenuity, an otherwise ordinary home (or body, for that matter) might be made as delightful as the streets of Florence. M

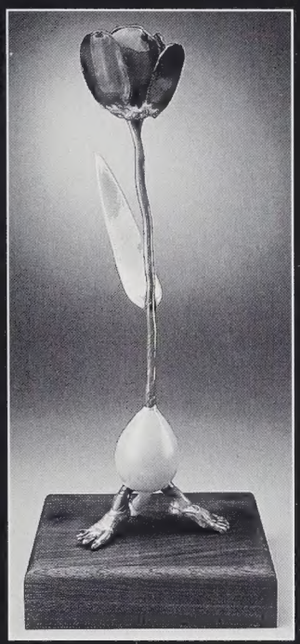
Bruce Metcalf is a jeweler and writer who lives in Philadelphia.

above
Drawing by the author of an eroded stone lion on the Loggia, Florence

SPRING SCREENINGS



CAROL GREEN



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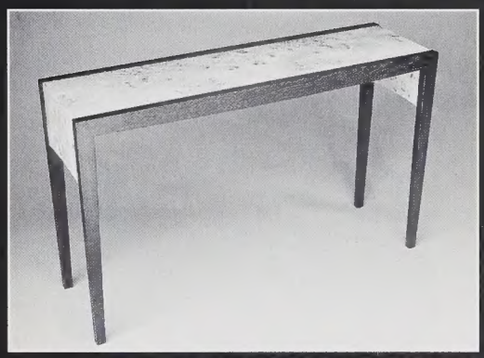
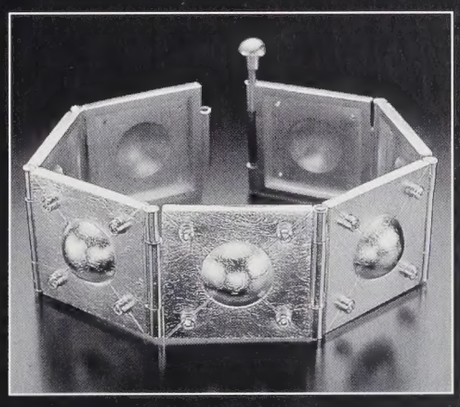


LINDA HAWKINSON & JAN VAN GEHUCHTEN

TOSHIE & MARICO CHIGYO



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Natural Disasters
silver, 24k
10 x 5 x 4"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha

CHRIS SMITH

The Luxury of STOLEN IMAGES

TEXT BY **KATE WAGLE**

To an uninitiated visitor driving west on Wilshire Boulevard in Santa Monica, the environment can be unsettlingly familiar. The terrain is urban and austere, punctuated by palms and bound by the clean edges of twentieth-century architecture in endless shades of white. One may experience the nostalgia of returning home after a long absence, an indefinable excitement, a rush of images, and memories triggered by the very clarity of the city's contours and atmosphere. Most of us have experienced this landscape before, in movies, projected larger-than-life with the impact of an abstract expressionist canvas, or in the intimate privacy of our own homes, viewed on television over and over again as the backdrop for fabricated realities shared by millions. Chris Smith is a native of this region of our cultural imagination.

". . .IT BECAME APPARENT TO MANY THAT FOR ART TO BE DEMOCRATIC AND CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE, IT MUST BE STYLISTICALLY AND THEMATICALLY FLEXIBLE IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE THE PARTICULARISTIC CHARACTER OF VARIED LOCALES. . .AND INASMUCH AS THE ARTIST WAS EXPECTED TO COMMUNICATE, [HE] MUST SPEAK VISUALLY IN A LANGUAGE WHICH HE FULLY UNDERSTANDS AND WHICH IS CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD BY HIS AUDIENCE."

Howard E. Wooden, *Regionalism, American Art in the Great Depression.*

Smith connects the early development of her image-oriented metalwork with that of many contemporary artists whose theoretical and visual sources can be traced to the 1930s and New Deal "Regionalism". Thomas Craven, a forceful voice of the time, saw art-making as a "local" activity. "I am. . .as much concerned with the environment and experiences of the artist as with the created object—the two are inseparable."[1] More recently Lucy Lippard echoed this sentiment with a new connection that brings currency to Craven's statement, speaking of a commitment to "an art that is part of lived experience, as well as to a feminist fascination with the processes of everyday life."[2] Though Regionalism was initially more of a political construct than an aesthetically driven movement, few in 1935 escaped the influence of the regionalist [artists who] "built their art on American themes," though on the East Coast many continued

to be more influenced by the European Abstract experiments of the early 1900s. The "discovery" and sanctioning of American folk art, a continuum extending to contemporary Naive and Outsider artists dates to the political and aesthetic realities of this period. This work in turn influenced the Midwest figurative tradition, including the Chicago Imagists, such as H. C. Westermann (Smith talks about a teacher who corresponded and exchanged work with Westermann regularly, reading the letters aloud, and passing the drawings through the class), and the Hairy Who, with their close associations to West Coast Funk and the evolving work of Chris Smith.

Smith has also absorbed the visual and theoretical shifts of post-modernism, working through them in the context of her medium and its specific catalog of form and history. The works are a savvy and seamless sculptural conflation of narrative, figure, photograph, and function. She brings all into play, each claiming the others' territory, inviting speculation and analysis as to the true source of the work's obvious authority.

"THE SECOND-LARGEST CITY IN THE COUNTRY, IT RESTS IN A BOWL SURROUNDED BY FIVE MOUNTAIN RANGES AND AN OCEAN. . .AT NIGHT FROM THE AIR LOS ANGELES IS A MASSIVE GRIDWORK, AN ILLUMINATED CHECKERBOARD EXTENDING FROM THE INK-COLORED PACIFIC TO THE DARK FRINGE OF THE MOUNTAINS."

Riegert, Ray, *Hidden Southern California.*

Smith lives in Los Angeles, a rare fourth generation Californian whose work is deeply rooted in this dramatically banal and shaky topography. Los Angeles is one of those "vortices where people and environment work on each other"[3] (albeit a vast and complicated one). Smith is acutely aware of this relationship. Her visual vocabulary grew naturally in this somewhat unnatural place. She is fascinated by film, scandal, luxury, the legendary mystique that grates relentlessly against social fact and natural disaster. Lippard also writes that "place is seen from the inside, landscape from the outside, a backdrop for the experience of viewing."[4] Smith's work bridges these definitions. She explores the subtleties of interior, personal *placeness*, while exploiting the forms and significance of her surroundings to fabricate a material *location* complete with backdrop, viewing opportunities and props.

Physically, her work corresponds to the purely visual elements of her habitat with astonishing strength. The objects Smith builds are skillfully engineered, monochromatic studies of a richly glowing whiteness that speak as much of architectural form as they do of vessel or adornment. Each surface is crisply defined by rich textures. She occasionally brings color into the work as a focal point, for example using gold, "the orangey color," to *light* certain parts of a piece. Her compositions are both *sets*, prepared for a drama, and a record of carefully considered decisions that preserve a severe but eloquent sense of space and form.

"IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE, ARTISTS ADDRESS THE COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIPS THAT EXIST BOTH ON A PERSONAL AS WELL AS A SOCIO-POLITICAL LEVEL"

Beverly Penn, "The Narrative Impulse in Contemporary American Metalsmithing", *Metalsmith*, Spring 1993.

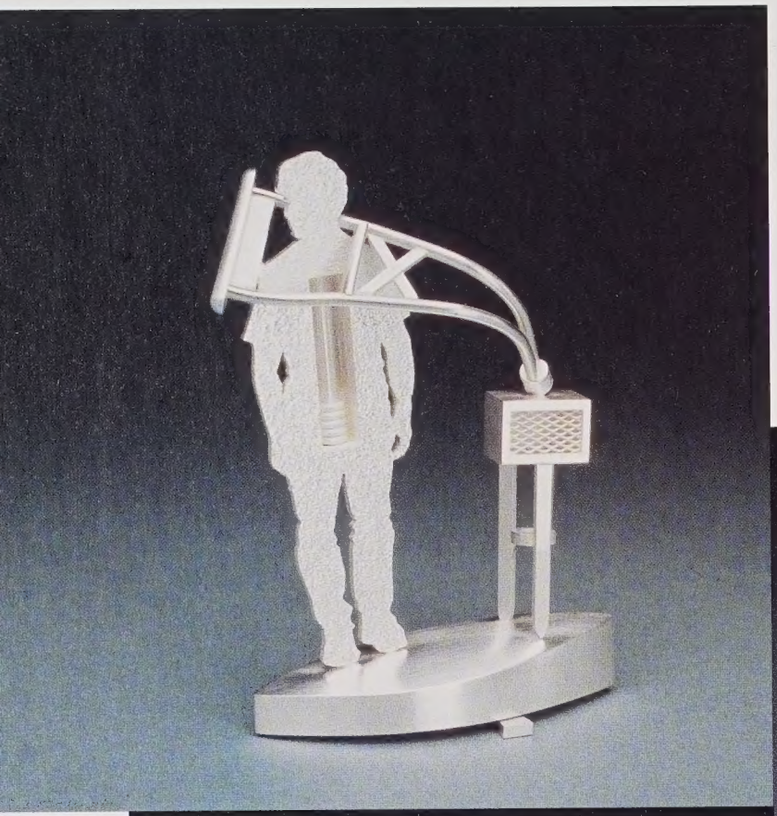
The pictorial units of Smith's pieces are fully functioning components of the formal structure, presented without the gloss of romance, arcane references to the past, or the nostalgic pull of the redefined found objects that characterize much contemporary narrative work. Smith says "I never think of 'narrative' when I make the work. I think in terms of a form. . .an object of a certain character. I also have a story, and the story is really hard to tell with the materials I'm working with. . .but that also makes me able to eliminate. . . ." A sense of coolness, that Smith thinks of as "space" for the viewer, is tied to this reductive process. She provides minimal, but purposefully evocative, clues to grant a controlled route into a narrative piece without overtly defining the encounter.

Smith's stories are culled from her own experience, each of her pieces delivering evidence of a specific set of events. A lecture by the artist is an illuminating parallel performance of telling those stories in elaborate detail, a chatty monologue emanating from a territory somewhere north of Jo Harvey Allen and west of Spalding Gray, inhabited by family and friends. In this role as performer she places herself at an amused, but slightly hysterical distance from her confessional subject matter. Her delivery is dry and well-timed, with a finely tuned sense of character and punch-line. The stories are punctuated by an intermittent, self-incredulous "Hah!"– a recognition of the ironies and inconsistencies of life. The same qualities of astute observation, truth, and humor speak as well through the multiple visual vocabularies in her work.

Smith is committed to the figure as a sentient presence in her narrative objects. Their characterization has evolved over time from an abstracted icon, reminiscent of the dream-like apparitions of Jonathan Borofsky, to appropriated news photography that references the seriousness and universality of the documentary, to posed portraits using family as models.

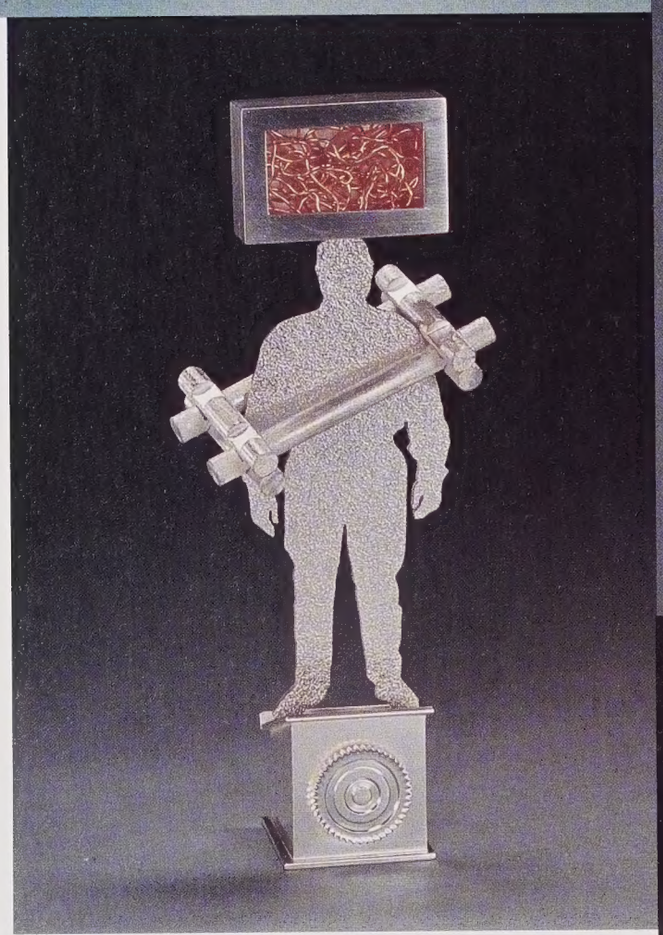
The early stylized figures came from her drawings, influenced by the Hairy Who and West Coast Funk among others, and were

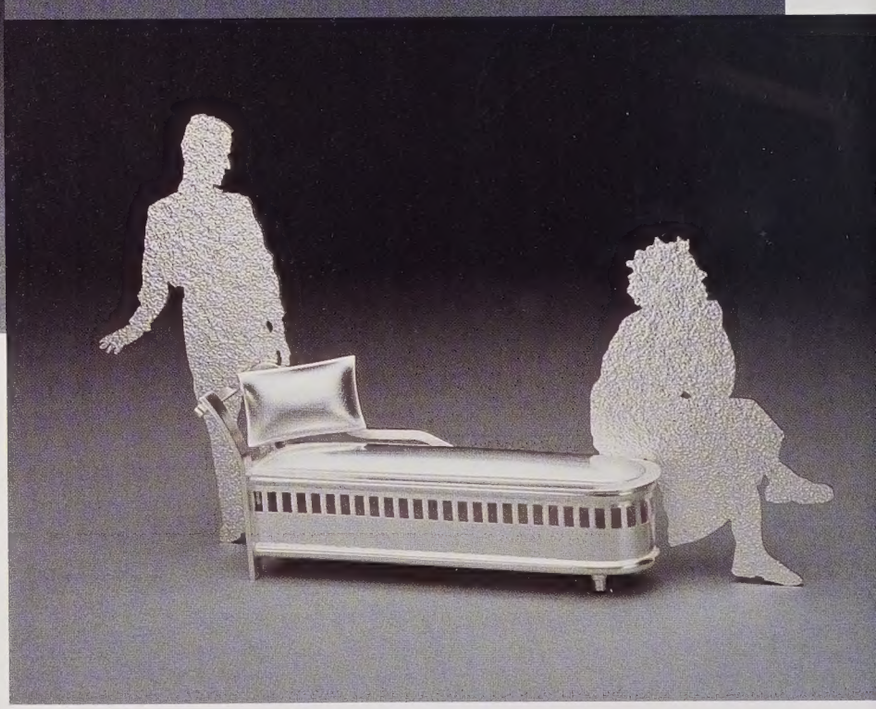
I Give Up, 1997
silver
9 x 7 x 5"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha



left
Can't Seem to Do the Simple Things (brooch)
silver
$2^{3}/_{4} \times 2 \times {}^{5}/_{8}$"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha

below
Toxic Amputation (brooch), 1988
silver, acrylic
$4 \times 5 \times {}^{1}/_{2}$"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha





above
Just a Minute, Maude (brooch), 1989
silver
5 x 4 x 1"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha

right
Martha's Vineyard, Jackson Hole Twice (brooch), 1989
sterling
$4^{1}/_{4} \times 2 \times 1$"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha

eventually rejected as "caricatures" when she began to explore photographic images from decades-old issues of *Life* and *Look*. Her intention was to shift her position closer to that of a documentarist, described by Susan Sontag as: "Gazing on other people's reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal."[5] Smith, however, used this perspective as a device to gaze on her own reality, deliberately seeking images from specific time periods that coincided with childhood memories and appropriating a legitimized selection of shared cultural models for her autobiographical and political purposes. In her current work she has assumed responsibility for the figure again, photographing family members as models for the psychologically activated silhouettes that she sometimes refers to as "self-portraits."

While Christina Smith is one of many metalsmiths who work with the figure (Bruce Metcalf comes to mind when discussing the early work, and Smith relates to and admires Gijs Bakker's refined photo/adornment compositions), her recent constructions can be productively compared to the work of other contemporary artists. Ida Applebroog's small window-like paintings of the 1980s speak of a voyeurism that may be a factor in Smith's work as well. The paintings are like "furtively glimpsing the activities and conversation fragments of strangers. Like James Stewart's character in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, the viewer experiences these. . .snapshots of other people's lives, that. . .inform our own awareness."[6] Smith cites Louise Bourgeois as an influence, identifying particularly with the *Femmes Maisons*. She relates her own work and some of its imagery to Bourgeois's tensions of geometric and organic, rigidity and malleability, architecture and viscera, as well as their reference to the house as body and soul, the first *place* of refuge, warmth, and memory.[7] Robert Longo's black and white figurative drawings also exploit evocative contemporary silhouettes that are similar to Smith's. But while Longo's work is deliberately cold, detailed by assistants to polish away the personal, Smith's pieces are hand burnished and speak of the attention of the individual craftsperson.

Longo's and Bourgeois's dramatic, arched-back figures exist as isolated psychological archetypes. Applebroog's blank-faced actors often project a flat ennui. In contrast Smith's silhouetted, featureless, but expressive bodies act and interact. They are pensive, puzzled; they argue and sulk. Smith thinks of them as "ghost images," an optical effect that occurs when the light of a projector disappears from the screen. The texture of the figures, a restrained glitter that could have been cut out of a movie screen, confirms this reference. One can imagine this surface receiving our own projections, suddenly flaring with color and detail. "It's as if I stole that image. . . .I think of it that way," says Smith. "When I put the figurative image into the piece, I'm still thinking about that person. . .like I'm actually stealing them. . .their souls. . .for my pieces."

Susan Stewart, *On Longing*

In all of this work, the sense of urban *placeness* is shifted radically by scale. Applebroog moved to monumental scale in the 1980s, to a cinematic panorama. "A Longo drawing has the impact of a drive-in movie glimpsed from the highway,"[8] and he says that his work "exists somewhere between movies and monuments." If a parallel can be drawn, it is that Smith's work in contrast quotes the home movie, snapshots, and vernacular material culture. In keeping with her commitment to her medium and subject matter, she limits the scale, familiarizes the image, and in doing so maintains her integrity and role as a craftsperson. She also brings into play another powerful reference to personal narrative, the miniature and its capacity to present an experience of interiority: "That the world of things can open itself to reveal a secret life. . .indeed, to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception. . .is a constant daydream that the miniature represents."[9]

Smith's use of masterfully rendered *props* (familiar objects miniaturized) to indicate relative, though often wildly surreal, scale makes her fabricated scenarios convincing. This organization of forms is also a cleverly bent quotation of the outmoded technique of placing things (a ruler, a rose, a penny, etc.), in the field of small object photographs to indicate scale. By grounding the viewer in the world of familiar objects she provides connection and access while indulging her jeweler's affection for the diminutive *tour de force*. The props are also *icons*, significant entities that reference a time, place, and feeling for the artist.

If scale can be established by correspondences to the familiar, what can be made of the surreal context of teapot and tray as the boundaries of a place? Smith says: "The trays are important. I have always had the trays to hold the objects . . .The objects are more [narratively] important than the figure. . .they *could* be sugar tongs, but they're not." Yet the trays also serve to frame and bring closure to the narrative. Like the literary device of Jonathan Swift's Lilliput, it is absolutely necessary that all of Smith's pieces be islands. Her miniature situations require separation from the proportions of the real world in order to establish their own systems and rationales. As Susan Stewart observes, "The miniature world remains

perfect and uncontaminated by the grotesque so long as its boundaries are maintained."[10] This type of contextual closure is particularly well served by the structure of tableaux, in that physical representation offers the possibility of complete isolation from surrounding reality.

Smith's works can be characterized as *tableaux*. The scale of her figures is also that of the snapshot and that fact lends the tableau credibility. In a culture habituated to the notion of photographs and their familiar dimensions as a discrete record of reality, the eccentricity of the proportional relationships in Smith's pieces are canceled, for a moment at least. Susan Sontag speaks of "Photographs which fiddle with the scale of the world . . .age, plagued by the usual ills of paper objects. . . ."[11] In this regard Smith's work both alludes to and parallels the photograph, referencing precious metal-on-paper processes (silver and platinum prints), that as objects *constructed* of metal become precious, hyper-real; they do not age.

"TO PHOTOGRAPH IS TO APPROPRIATE THE THING PHOTOGRAPHED. IT MEANS PUTTING ONESELF INTO A CERTAIN RELATION TO THE WORLD THAT FEELS LIKE KNOWLEDGE . . .AND, THEREFORE LIKE POWER."

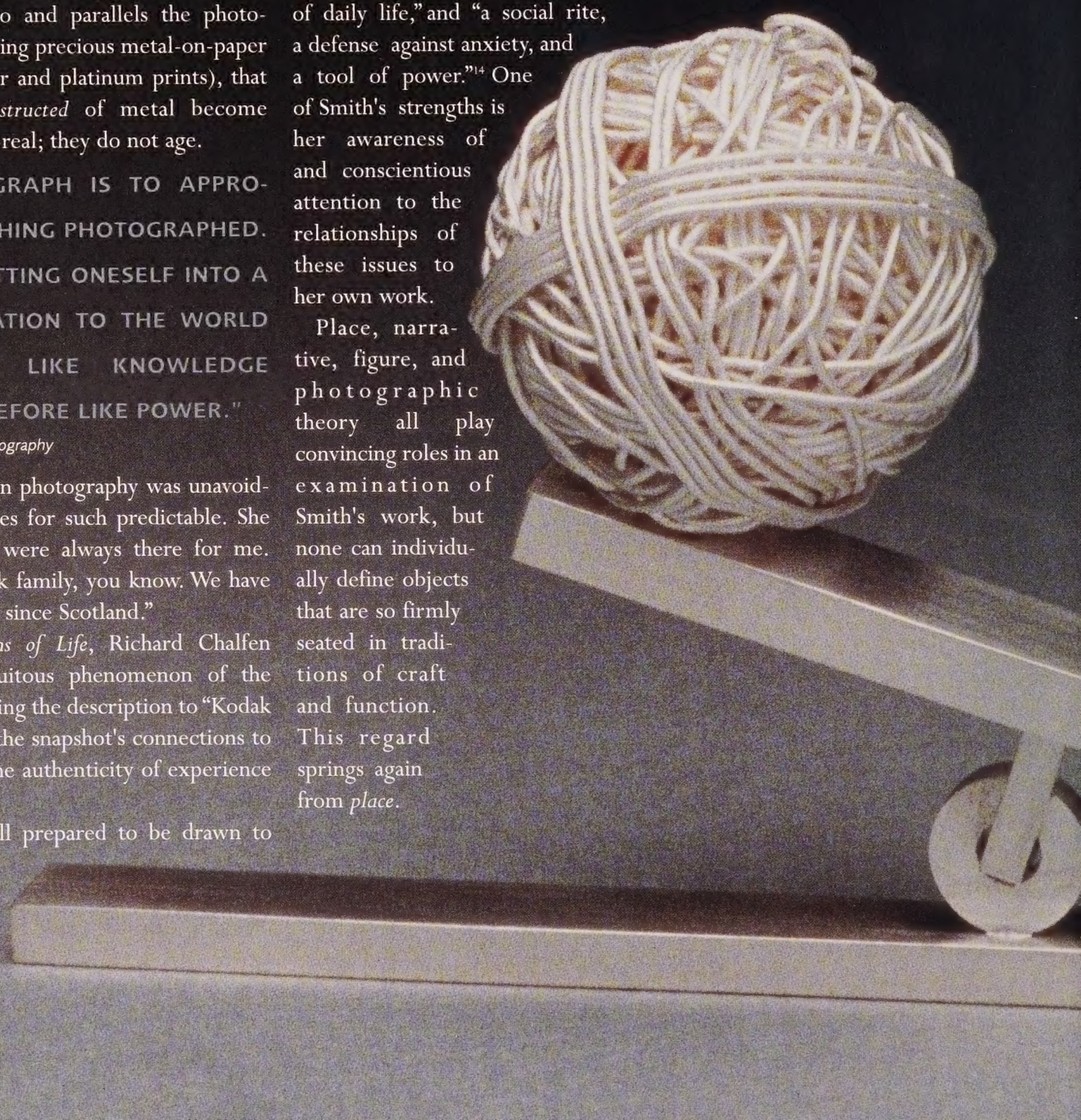
Sontag, Susan, *On Photography*

Smith's interest in photography was unavoidable, her preferences for such predictable. She says, "Photographs were always there for me. Ours was the Kodak family, you know. We have family photo albums since Scotland."

In *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Richard Chalfen speaks of the ubiquitous phenomenon of the Kodak family, extending the description to "Kodak culture"[12], and notes the snapshot's connections to Folk Art, as well as the authenticity of experience that it represents.

Smith was thus well prepared to be drawn to photography as an art form when she lived in Texas in the early 1980s. She was in contact there with a group of talented young people who were experimenting with fusions of photography, painting, and sculpture. Smith was most interested in new explorations of vernacular photography, the snapshot-as-subject, and banal imagery. The intention of many artists working in this area was to employ the visual and procedural conventions of the snapshot in an effort to explore its edges as cultural artifact and aesthetic object. The snapshot was seen to illuminate a "relationship between individuals, human society and the symbolic environment."[13] By tuning in to this communicative power Smith takes on a load of conceptual baggage. Susan Sontag makes a number of assertions regarding snapshots, among these that they are "memento mori," "collectible objects . . .souvenirs of daily life," and "a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power."[14] One of Smith's strengths is her awareness of and conscientious attention to the relationships of these issues to her own work.

Place, narrative, figure, and photographic theory all play convincing roles in an examination of Smith's work, but none can individually define objects that are so firmly seated in traditions of craft and function. This regard springs again from *place*.



Balance Is Too Strenuous
(brooch)
silver
4 1/2 x 5 x 1"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha

"They're all about luxury!" she says with equal parts disingenuousness and engaging enthusiasm. The reality and myth of luxury are intrinsic to the nature of her region and her work. Indeed, in this country, most of our models for material luxury come from film and other media generated from the synthetic heart of Smith's home town.

"I love that stuff. I really love luxury objects . . .that's another reason for silver. . .The piece has to be *actually* precious. . .it couldn't be thin or plate." She is aware of the irony of such a statement and the related politically ambiguous nature of silversmithing as a relevant contemporary medium. On the nature of relevance and her recent group of tea-pot pieces she says: "I had to look at tea-pots in museums for models to work from, and the one I had already made had been purchased for a collection . . .but I still made them functional, and that's important to me." Function serves the purpose of honoring the ritual of the traditional forms. The tea-pot bodies, rendered in an expanded silhouette, similar to the figures, correlate as well to a European heritage of affluence and advantage.

The ideal of material luxury that Smith embraces in her own work hardly exists any more outside of the narrow world of contemporary fine-art metalsmithing. Hand-made parts that work, intricacy, the tightness of hinge and closure, all speak of a quality that requires time and training that are beyond post-modern expectations.

The object Smith refers to is a historic artifact of another social order, or yet another cultural fantasy. The luxury object of our contemporary culture is often mass produced, thin, if not plate, and marketed as luxury. Smith's, however, are the real thing. Every consideration is given to aspects of use: from the wearability of her jewelry, to teapots which may never be used, but which according to Smith's rigorous standards of authenticity, *have* to pour *well*. Drawers in boxes open smoothly, lids fit perfectly and strainers occupy their proper place in the necks of teapots. The turn and click of elegantly engineered, smoothly functional mechanisms, the sure weight of the precious metal, the loving attention to texture and detail, self-consciously celebrate both a tradition and fiction of luxury while subtly subverting its social place and meaning.

Smith invokes the ritualized gentility of the tea-pot, employing its familiar outline and the materiality of silver with its associations of privilege, wealth, and power. She offers it for the consumption of those who might desire such an object and can afford it. But what she proffers is not a blank, generic vessel for projected allusions. Instead each piece demands that the viewer contextualize those references, and accept Smith's personal tableau, with its content of the banal, the mundane, and the anxieties and pressures of daily life. It is an interesting and subtle political stance, one which places Smith's work in yet another territory of social critique.

An analysis of Christina Smith's catalog of works reveals a critical structure founded in honesty and satire, positioned not only in a physical or historical framework, but (again in the words of Lucy Lippard) at "the intersections of nature, culture, history and ideology [that] form the ground on which we stand...our land, our place, the local."[15] The work declares again and again Smith's attentiveness to the influences that inform this aesthetic location, and speaks of a strong value system, a willful procedure of object-making that can be measured by the integrity of her process, her intelligent, skilled use of materials and meticulous investigation of her subject. M

Kate Wagle is a professor of metalsmithing at the University of Oregon, Eugene.

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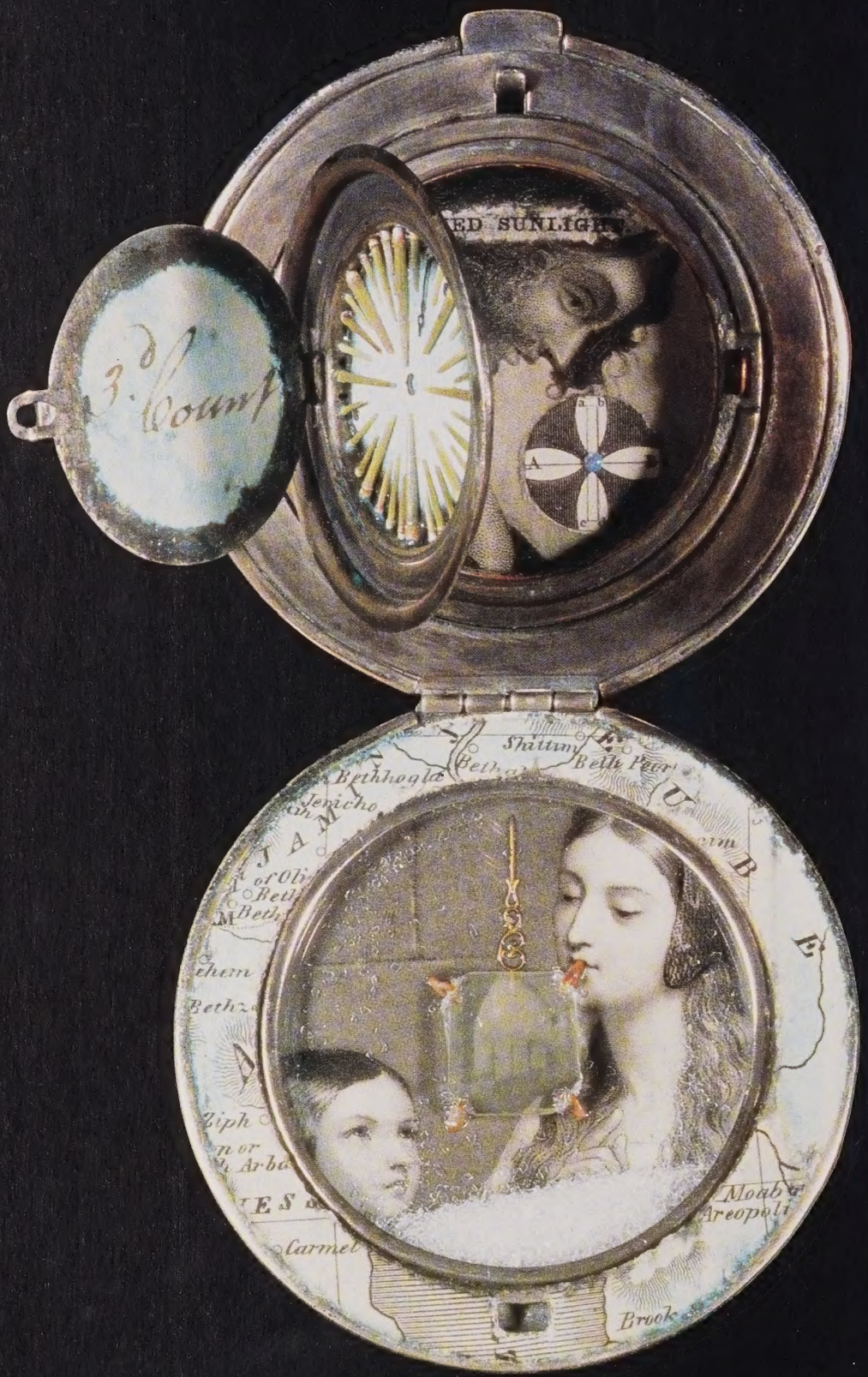
[1] Wooden, 27.
[2] Lippard, 5.
[3] Lippard, 9.
[4] Lippard, 8.
[5] Sontag, 55.
[6] Sultan, 4.
[7] Bernadac, 27.
[8] Ratcliff, 13.
[9] Stewart, 54.
[10] Stewart, 4.
[11] Sontag, 73.
[12] Chalfen, 162.
[13] See Chalfen.
[14] Sontag, 7.
[15] Lippard, 28.

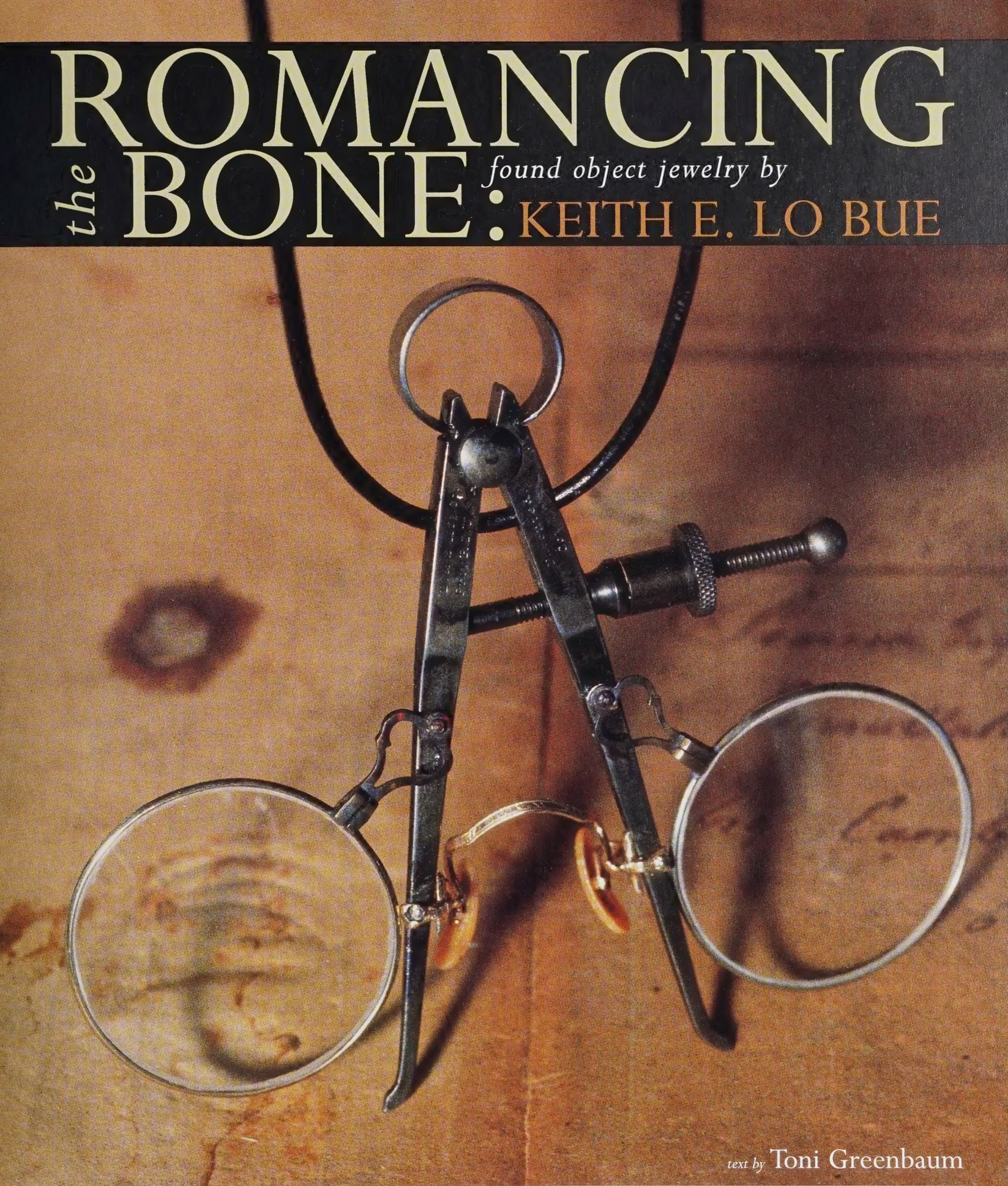
Securing For Nature (brooch), 1989
silver
4 x 3 x 1"
Photograph by Anthony Cunha



this page
Buried Sunlight (brooch), 1997
Ladies' compact case, engravings, maps, color lithographs, watch crystal, crushed glass, ambrotype fragment, thorns, brass button, copper plaque, watch gear, enamel watch face, sea urchin spines, watch hands, paper, text, opals, soil

opposite page
Divider Frames (neckwear/eyepiece), 1996
dividers, gold eyeglasses bridge, optometrist's lenses, leather

ROMANCING the BONE: found object jewelry by KEITH E. LO BUE



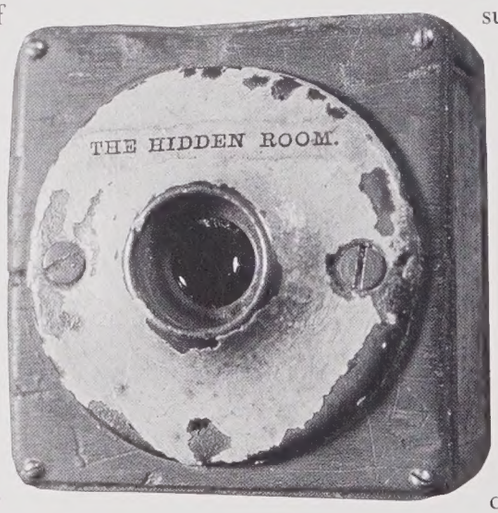
text by Toni Greenbaum

Keith Lo Bue creates jewelry by assembling fragments of once vital entities. Most of the bits and pieces come from dead animals and insects, old tools, or abandoned artifacts. He is drawn to the past, to styles once admired and imitated only to be eventually discarded in the name of progress. He dwells on minutiae and the detritus of natural, as well as cultural, history: skulls from raccoons and birds, bones from deer and chickens, sea urchin spines, old scientific instruments, and photographs and texts from antique books. Lo Bue's jewelry houses miniature tableaux, scenes which sometimes recall the pathos of

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mourning jewelry. His dreamlike world is often dolorous, furnished with displaced images that create a visual poetry. The jewelry is intensely personal, talismanic, cathartic. It connects the owner with other times and places, alternative universes comprised of what may be familiar but is never commonplace. The individual elements, which make up the jewelry, don't function in prescribed or expected ways. Combinations are bizarre and contradictory. As Lo Bue states: "Strung together by the human urge to classify, objects in these fabricated environments form a fractured and dislocated *second history*, one that ignores factual origins."[1] He combines the elements intuitively, but the results are always sensible and logical, if not obvious or apparent.

...SKULLS *from* RACCOONS *and* BIRDS, BONES *from* DEER *and* CHICKENS, SEA URCHIN SPINES, OLD SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS, *and* PHOTOGRAPHS *and* TEXTS *from* ANTIQUE BOOKS...

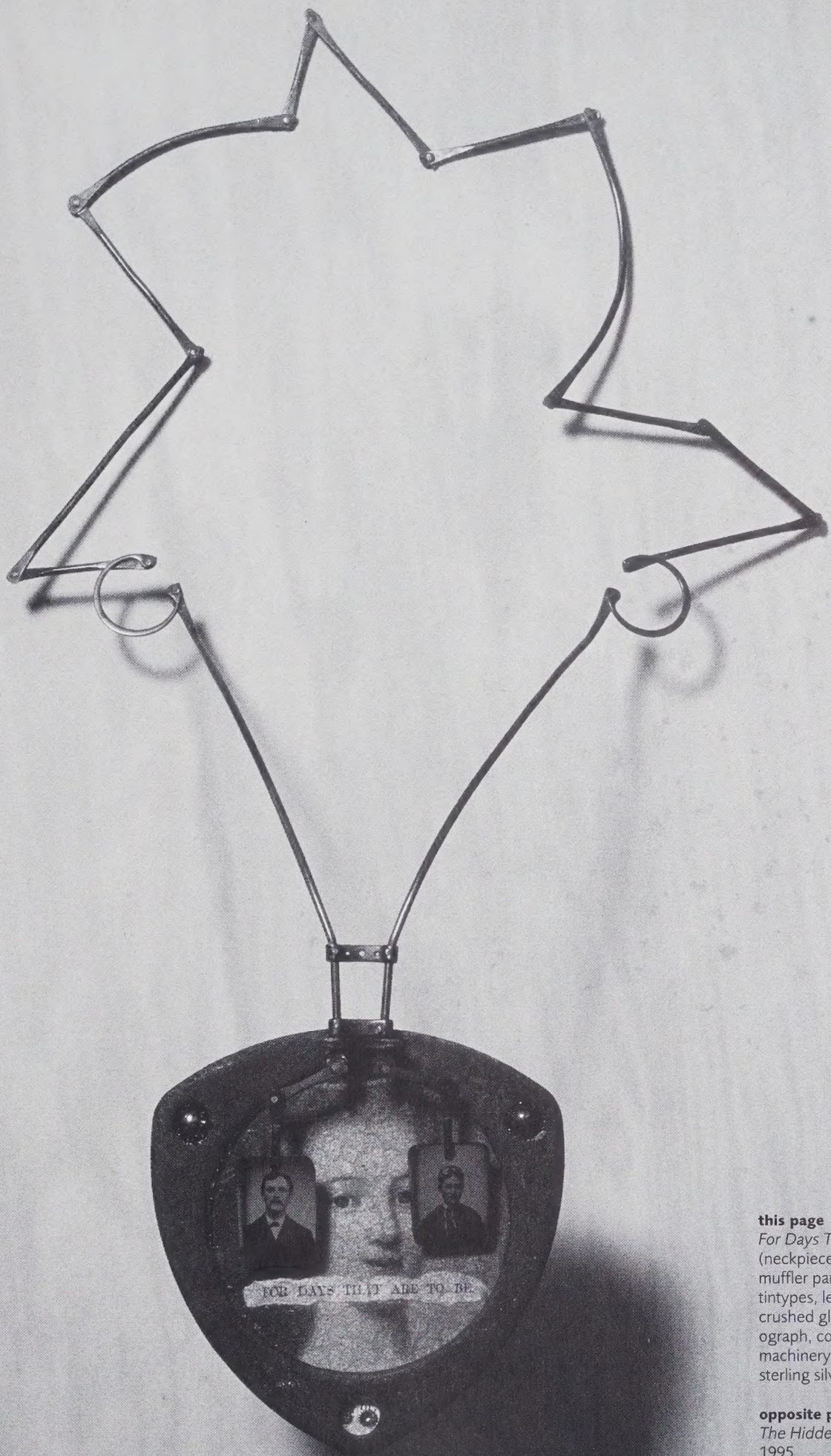
Lo Bue attended the State University of New York at Purchase, where he received a B.F.A. in illustration and photography in 1986. He claims to have received his real art education, however, studying the paintings and sculptures at the Museum of Modern Art, where he worked as a security guard, during the summers of 1984 and 1985, while earning his degree. At that time, Lo Bue was immersed in commercial art but found himself responding to its "dark side." His early work was informed by the English record labels of painter Russell Mills and graphic artist Vaughan Oliver, record cover art from the mid to late 1980s, the atmospheric rock music of David Sylvian, and the stop-motion animation of the Brothers Quay. His greatest influence, however, came from the Joseph Cornell exhibition, *Dovecoats, Hotels, and Other White Spaces*, held at Pace Gallery, New York in 1989. Lo Bue was inspired by Cornell's box format because of the layers of found objects and hidden surfaces. Always drawn to the miniature, he was especially taken with Cornell's *thimble forests* from the 1930s — tiny assemblages made from three-inch *hat boxes* lined with mirrors that reflect stalk-mounted thimbles which vibrate when moved.



Lo Bue began making jewelry around 1988, propelled by the desire to create diminutive art. These early brooches recall not only Cornell's constructions but the dioramas in natural history museums as well. Lo Bue is fascinated by the surreal quality of these contrived scenes, the notion that, for example, birds of North America may share the same exhibition space though they do not necessarily relate to one another, or even come from the same region. There is no narrative. Images are fragmentary, experienced in much the same way as one remembers a dream upon waking. Absorption of the sensory information is automatic, causing personal associations to evoke emotional responses. In 1993, however, Lo Bue decided he needed to "bust out of Cornell's shadow." This led to his eschewing the box or frame format in favor of a more free assemblage.

Lo Bue's jewelry is always titled. The phrases are incorporated, furthermore, into the overall composition and appear prominently within the work. The titles, however, are fragmented, like other aspects of the jewels, having been torn from antique books or documents. Their meanings, though discernible, are equivocal and do not necessarily relate to the subject of the piece. Lo Bue does not wish to use words to reference the objects which have been chosen to comprise the jewel, but uses the titles as visual puns. The title is, nonetheless, the only verbiage which is meant to be readable; other textual fragments exist solely as graphic imagery, a purely visual element. If the text can be comprehended, its message is completely unrelated to the piece. The artist, nonetheless, relates a haunting story, which illustrates one instance that contradicts this aspect of his work. Around 1995, his vision became bleaker, grittier and more somber. Coincidentally, at about this time jeweler Robert Ebendorf gave him a fragment of Korean rice paper which had attracted him solely as a result of its beauty. Lo Bue could not read the characters; but unbeknownst to him, at the time, it contained a Korean funerary text. This incident offers the possibility that visual qualities may occasionally exist in certain objects that can suggest their meaning on a subliminal level. Though it may not be a deliberate act on his part, Lo Bue instinctively takes advantage of such phenomena.

Although Lo Bue also makes tabletop sculpture, his passion is jewelry. This bias results partially from a love for the miniature. He believes that the smaller an object can become the more power it possesses to concentrate the viewer's attention. Wearing, furthermore, creates a human scale environment, which encourages an even deeper communion with a piece. Lo Bue's jewelry, however, remains sculptural; and it can be read as sculpture that mocks utility, on several levels. It is also jewelry



this page
For Days That Are To Be (neckpiece), 1996
muffler part, sand, glass beads, tintypes, lens, watch parts, crushed glass, paper, text, lithograph, coat hanger wire, machinery clips, wing bolt, sterling silver, copper, glass

opposite page
The Hidden Room (brooch), 1995
mahogany, doorknob rosette, glass, screws, lens, paper, engraving, yellowjacket heads, text, soil

above
Where I Live (ring), 1997
etched and oxidized sterling silver, brass, lens, film positive, glass, paint

right
Buried Sunlight (brooch), 1997
compact case, engravings, maps, color lithographs, watch crystal, crushed glass, ambrotype fragment, thorns, brass button, copper plaque, watch gear, enamel watch face, sea urchin spines, watch hands, paper, text, opals, soil

that questions the concept of usability in general, and the function of jewelry, in particular. Some necklaces are too large, or extend too far from the body, to be worn comfortably. Additionally, the pieces (mostly necklaces and brooches) are composed of bits of formerly utilitarian objects: stethoscopes, hurricane lamps, drafting tools, and muffler parts. The jewels, therefore, imply function, without any of their parts actually working. They can be interpreted as homages to utility, but the technologies referenced are antiquated, no longer useful machines which have been replaced by current models that are possibly more modern but are undoubtedly less beautiful.

They can be interpreted as HOMAGES TO UTILITY, *but the technologies referenced are* ANTIQUATED, *no longer useful machines which have been* REPLACED BY *current models that are possibly* MORE MODERN *but are undoubtedly* LESS BEAUTIFUL.

Lo Bue's jewelry often contains moving parts, such as springs or marbles that agitate when the wearer walks. In addition to explicit movement, he also experiments with implied movement through natural or manufactured optical lenses that possess the potential to distort what lies behind them. It is well known that light refracted through certain transparent objects can enhance the illusion of movement. Arguably, the most comprehensive modern art-related study of this phenomenon was conducted in the 1930s and '40s by Hungarian Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy. His book, *Vision in Motion*, is a treatise on his aesthetic canon, as well as his theories of art education, as taught at the Institute of Design in Chicago, which he directed until his death in 1946. Moholy-Nagy wrote: "*vision in motion* is simultaneous grasp. . . a synonym for simultaneity and space-time. . . seeing while moving. . . seeing objects either in reality or in forms of visual representation."[2] Moholy-Nagy created "light and/or space modulators" from transparent materials such as clear, curved sheet plastic and perforated metal sheet or wire mesh, each of which both distorted and cast shadows on its immediate environment, thereby giving the illusion of movement. Moholy-Nagy inspired his students to achieve *vision in motion* by exploring transparency in similar ways. Margaret de Patta, who studied at the Institute of Design, was notable for designing semi-precious stones to be cut so as to maximize their potential as instruments of distortion.[3] She designed stones which were eccentrically cut in such a manner that they magnified or diminished elements such as gold bars or other smaller stones mounted within or behind them. Although not a proponent of Constructivist theories of non-objectivity like de Patta, Lo Bue uses transparency in a similar fashion.

The Two Voyagers is composed of a crystal sphere mounted within the top of a hurricane lamp. Both an antique engraving, which depicts a profile, and the title, cut from an old manuscript, are placed behind the transparent stone and are consequently distorted. As with de Patta's jewelry, the resultant image is dependent upon one's angle of vision, changing as the wearer moves. Lo Bue uses lenses, furthermore, to force the viewer to focus, to study each element within the jewelry individually. To that end, *All' Ornatissimo* uses a small diminishing lens, mounted in a circular frame of carved mahogany, to miniaturize a cicada placed within a larger rectangular frame behind it.

Occasionally, certain aspects of a piece are not apparent when viewed from the outside alone. Upon peering into the lens, set within a doorknob plate, which is the centerpiece of *The Hidden Room*, one sees an antique portrait of a woman surrounded by eight actual yellow-jacket heads. Lo Bue thus draws the viewer deep within the jewel, to bizarre hidden habitats which are revealed exclusively to those who make a concerted effort to enter them. *Buried Sunlight*, although it does not possess lenses, nonetheless, also contains hidden elements and can be viewed in a number of altered formats. Its framework is an old compact with several compartments which can remain closed or may be opened to reveal from two to four hidden images. Both of these brooches allow the wearer to control what is seen, to maintain secrets, thereby enhancing the intensely personal nature of the jewelry.

Lo Bue was not a trained metalsmith, and ultimately it became apparent to him that his ability to make jewelry was limited by a lack of technical knowledge. In 1995, he took a class in jewelry-making at a local community college and later that year met Robert Ebendorf, whom Lo Bue credits with "edging [him] into metals and showing [him] that there was as much nuance in metals as in wood." Formerly, Lo Bue used metals empirically, that is, by wrapping, twisting, folding, *et cetera*. After working on his own wedding rings, under Ebendorf's tutelage, Lo Bue realized that forging, piercing and soldering could extend his options. Although he had no intention of relinquishing his former methods entirely, he believed that each material would ultimately dictate its own means of

assembly; with the addition of metalsmithing skills to his manual repertory, he would possess an almost endless fund of technical possibilities. Lo Bue still uses found objects almost exclusively, but necklaces, for example, from which pendants are suspended, are often hammered into shape, and rings are forged from silver, which is then etched and oxidized.

Lo Bue's work is full of irony, both in concept and execution. One of his most sardonic visual puns can be seen in his eyewear which, even more than the quasi-ornamental necklaces and brooches, exemplifies much of his aesthetic philosophy. These spectacles are the most functional objects he has made, to date, yet the scientific logic, the utility behind their existence, has been compromised, due to the fragmentary nature of their parts. Each pair of spectacles is made up of recognizable bits of old tools: rulers, drafting or nautical instruments, pocket watch workings, *et cetera*. However, each has been stripped of its original use and recombined in such a manner as to create a wholly different machine — one which relies totally on form for its visual success and functions in an environment completely unrelated to the fragment's original intent. Adding to the irony, Lo Bue also makes spectacles which are intended solely as adornment and have no real function, as corrective lenses, at all.

Lo Bue's jewelry challenges almost all of the senses. He guides one to look differently at the commonplace, to see beauty in decay, romance in disparity, to feel the coarseness and patina which only decades of handling can add to an artifact. He invites one to listen closely for subtle sounds within a piece, such as a gyrating metal coil or a rolling sphere, activated by the wearer's movements. He may occasionally entice the viewer to participate with the jewel by manipulating a working part, such as ringing the typewriter bell in *The Judge's Daughter*; and although one cannot actually taste the crab whose claws grace the ends of a bolo tie, or smell the crushed rose petals tucked behind a shard of broken glass, one's senses are stimulated and the *pseudo-satisfaction* of a virtual experience is enhanced.

Lo Bue states that his work involves making connections between diverse phenomena: preservation and decay, memory and forgetting, reality and surreality. He refers to "a deliberate effort. . . to create a fragile technology. . . exhumed from the broken shards of the nineteenth-century [and] in this way strike an empathy with those who reached for the promise of progress with one hand while shielding their fallibility with another. . . And at this time in our cultural history when technology governs so much of what we do, this nod to an archaic device gains vitality. For me, it is an imperative."[4]

There are several levels of realization to Keith Lo Bue's jewelry: actual, conceptual, and subliminal. The more one exercises one's senses, the greater the rewards; the more one learns about the jewel, the more one understands one's self. *Account of An Apparition* houses two small lenses, each of which reveals the expected assortment of engraved images, textual fragments, instrument parts, soil, and flora. When the brooch is affixed to a garment, however, and the wearer looks down upon it, a third lens is revealed at the top. Peering into it, the viewer experiences his/her own eye looking back; this trick is accomplished with laser mirrors buried within the hollow tube. The myriad eye images of the past come to mind: Egyptian hieroglyphs, Middle Eastern eye symbols, and Western European mystery eye portrait miniatures, as well as the Surrealist paintings of Miró, Dalí, and Magritte. Lo Bue, however, takes the power of the eye image to a new plateau. His artistic eye is actually alive. It blinks, it may be wearing makeup, be shielded by a corrective lens or even have a cataract; and it looks back at the viewer from a most personal place. It is one's own mind's eye, replete with the sum total of the information, experiences, and recollections which the viewer allows him/herself to see.

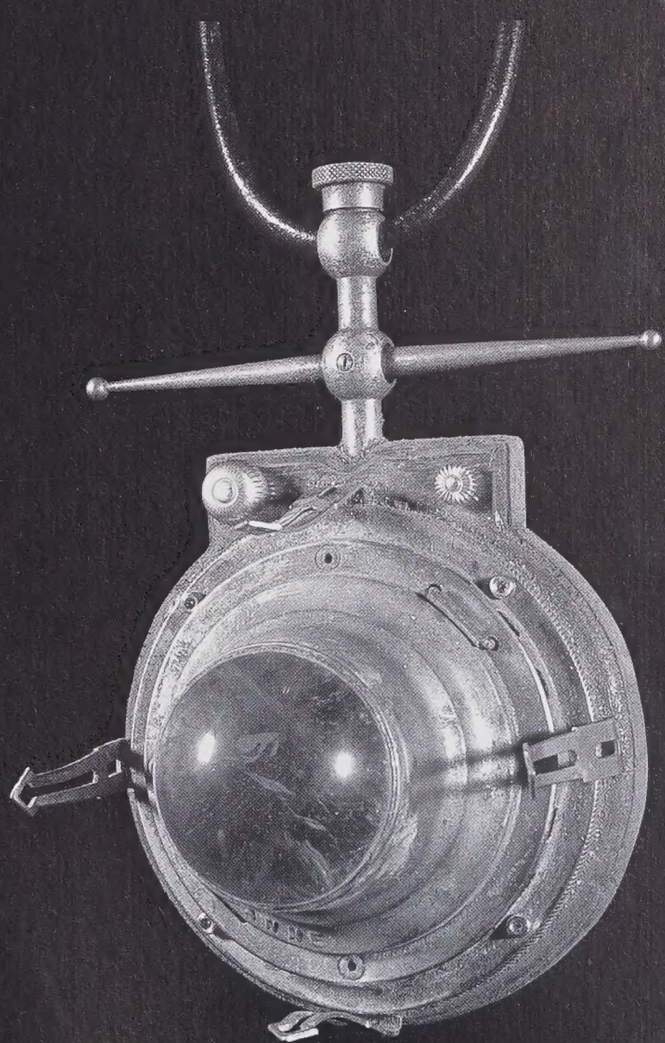
HIS ARTISTIC EYE IS ACTUALLY ALIVE.
***It blinks, it may be wearing makeup, be shielded by a corrective lens or even have a cataract; and* IT LOOKS BACK *at the viewer* FROM A MOST PERSONAL PLACE.**

Keith Lo Bue's jewelry can be nostalgic, dreamlike, off-putting, disquieting, or, in the extreme, terrifying. Sometimes, it is barely wearable. But it is always challenging and sometimes even brilliant. Admittedly, his jewelry hasn't much to do with traditional goldsmithing; but it is jewelry, nonetheless. It relies totally upon an intimate physical, emotional, psychological, and conceptual relationship with the human body and, at its best, with the soul. M

Keith Lo Bue's website can be found at: http://www.lobue-art.com

Toni Greenbaum is a writer and art critic who lives in New York, New York.

[1] Artist's statement.
[2] László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Paul Theobold, 1947; reprint 1969), 12.
[3] De Patta designed the stones in plastic, to be cut by San Francisco lapidary Francis J. Sperisen.
[4] Artist's statements, combined.



above
The Two Voyagers (neckpiece), 1997
painted wood, pocket watch winding screws, industrial instrument part, hurricane lamp top, hardware, crystal sphere, engravings, shell, crab claw, glass, leather, plastic medical instrument part, paper, text, soil

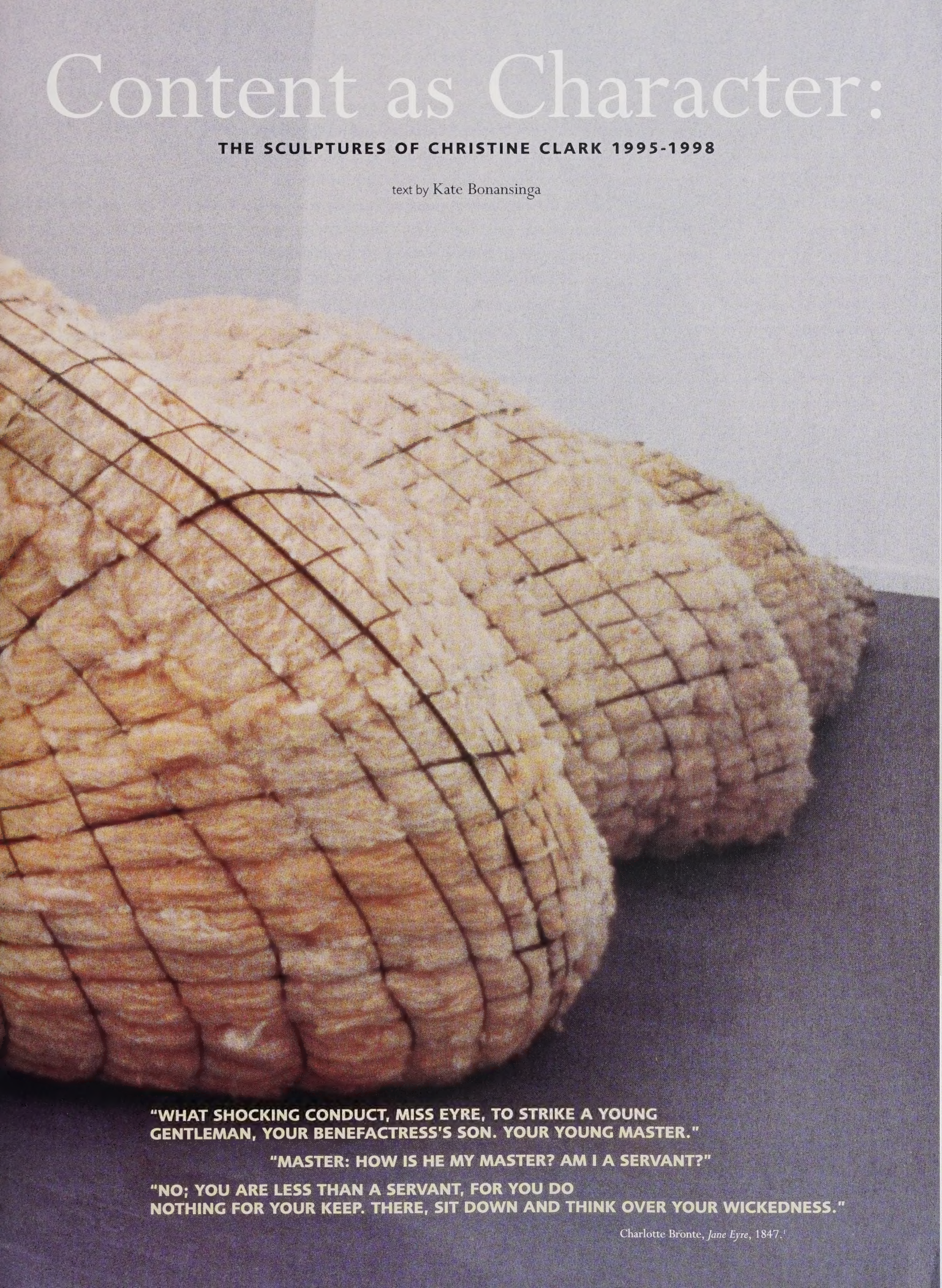
right
The Sea Defeated (brooch), 1993
pocket watch face and mount, wire, seahorse, watchspring, shell, paper, text
Collection: American Craft Museum, New York City

Warm Body
(a site specific sculpture), 1997
steel, wool
4 x 7 x 15'

Content as Character:

THE SCULPTURES OF CHRISTINE CLARK 1995-1998

text by Kate Bonansinga



"WHAT SHOCKING CONDUCT, MISS EYRE, TO STRIKE A YOUNG GENTLEMAN, YOUR BENEFACTRESS'S SON. YOUR YOUNG MASTER."

"MASTER: HOW IS HE MY MASTER? AM I A SERVANT?"

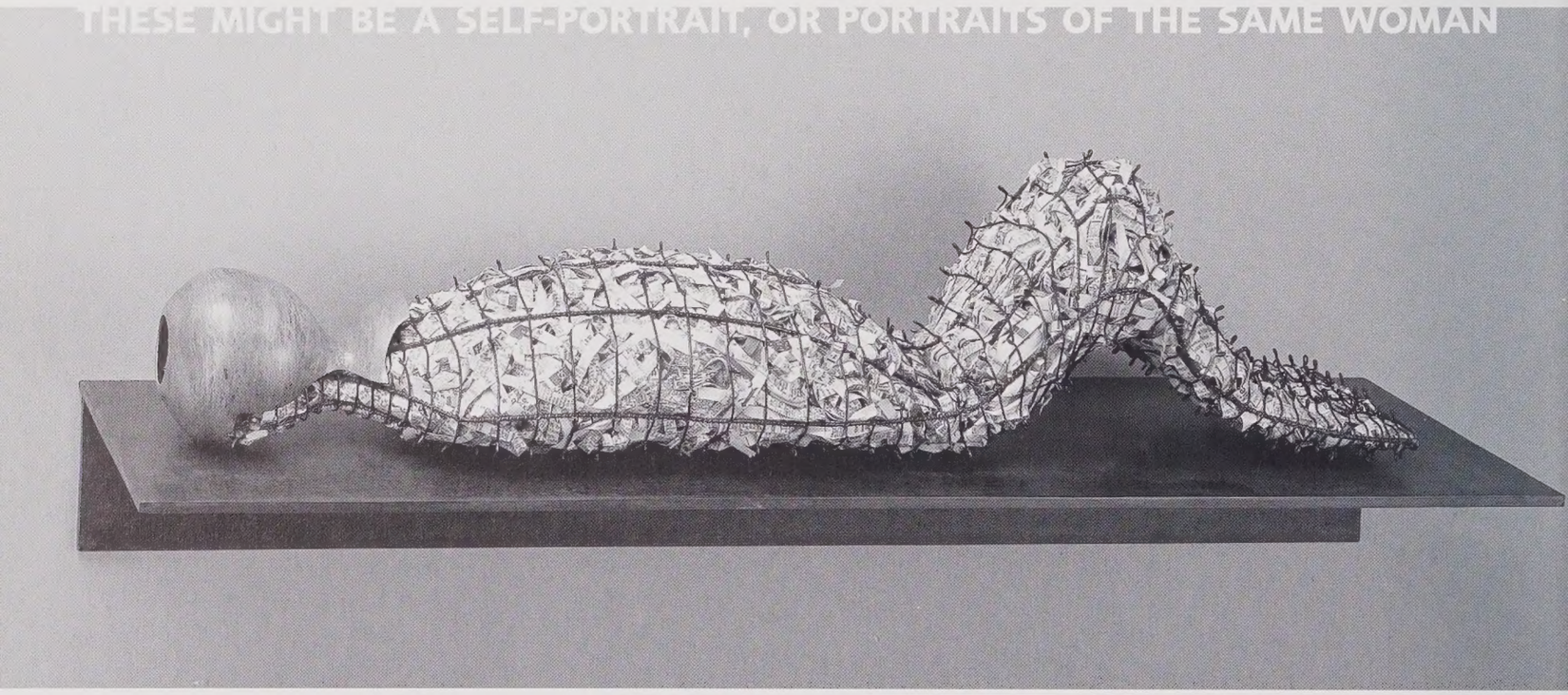
"NO; YOU ARE LESS THAN A SERVANT, FOR YOU DO NOTHING FOR YOUR KEEP. THERE, SIT DOWN AND THINK OVER YOUR WICKEDNESS."

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, 1847.

A fifteen-foot long steel armature packed with sheep's wool lies like a blanketed, reclining figure, heavy with fatigue. Narrow and low to the ground at the feet, it undulates, ever wider and higher, from the legs and torso to the expanded lungs, then drops to a limp neck and bulbous head. *Warm Body*, 1997, marks the beginning of sculptor Christine Clark's more literal depiction of the human form, one that is currently maturing and diversifying. A part of a series beginning in 1992, it is one of several biannual site-specific installations that explores ideas which reference Victorian ornament and customs and parallel those in her sculptures of more modest scale.

Clark received her M.F.A. from the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1983. In the late 1980s and early 1990s she assembled mixed-media, representational narratives that commented on some aspect of the contemporary human condition. During the summer of 1992 Clark enrolled in a forging workshop with Bill Fiorini at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and the following summer was awarded a senior artist-in-residency at the Oregon College of Art and Craft in Portland. She has been on the faculty since 1984. It was in Oregon, during the residency, that Clark built a forge and began to perfect her blacksmithing techniques.

Consequently, the forged elements, once secondary in works like *Fried Eggs*, 1992, which was part of a series addressing our obsession with food, became primary to her sculptures that date between the years 1994-1997. The central element in each of these is a closed, woven form of steel wire filled with usually organic matter. For example, one holds clippings of brunette hair, two others are filled with straw, four with wool similar to that in *Warm Body*. Another contains bird feathers, and the steel form becomes a cage. All are about three feet high and supported by



four forged steel legs that end in tight spirals. In the works from 1994-1996, these legs extend equally above and below the central form, serving as corner posts from which the vessel hangs, lending the pieces an architectural quality.

The Differences #1 and *#2*, 1995, contain straw. One is shaped like a teardrop, the other like two stacked, shallow, bulbous bowls. The accompanying temporary installation, also titled *Differences*, was composed of three six-and-a-half foot high voluminous sculptures packed with straw, their steel-rod armatures made almost transparent by their overflowing contents. Their shapes varied slightly, but all were abstractions of the human form with profiles that gently oscillated. The visual dominance of the straw spoke of the dominance of inner character over outward structure or appearance. *Differences* also addressed the simultaneous transience and

right top
The Differences #1, 1995
steel, straw
39 x 12 x 12"
Photograph by Vince Radostitz

right
She's Resting Comfortably Now, 1998
steel, flowers
9 x 8 x 35"
Photograph by Bill Bachhuber

above
Knowledge Within, 1998
steel, newspaper
9 x 8 x 31 1/2"
Photograph by Bill Bachhuber

BECOME A PART OF THE CREATIVE AND SPECTACULAR

Barbara Minor

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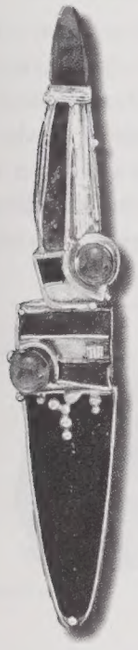

Judith Kaufman

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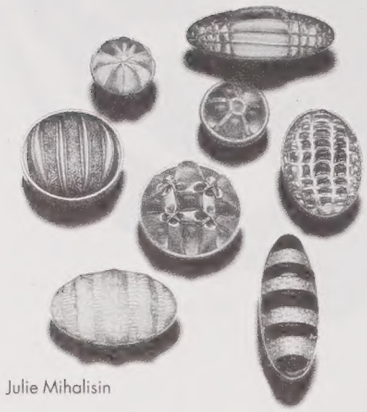

Julie Mihalisin

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Metalsmith regularly features leading figures past and present, their work, their philosophies and their impact on today's metal arts world. They are the teachers, artists and designers who have helped make metalsmithing into a fine art.

Bruce MacDonald

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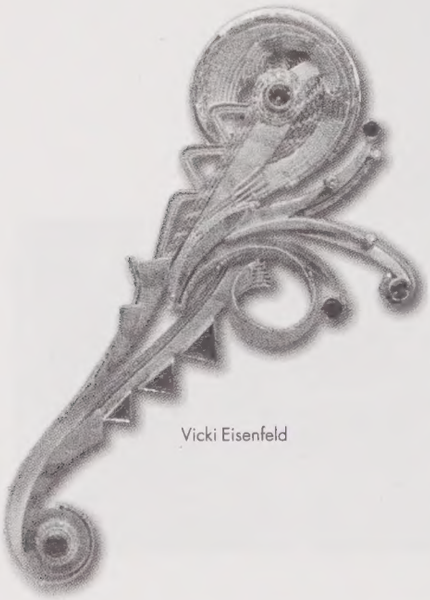

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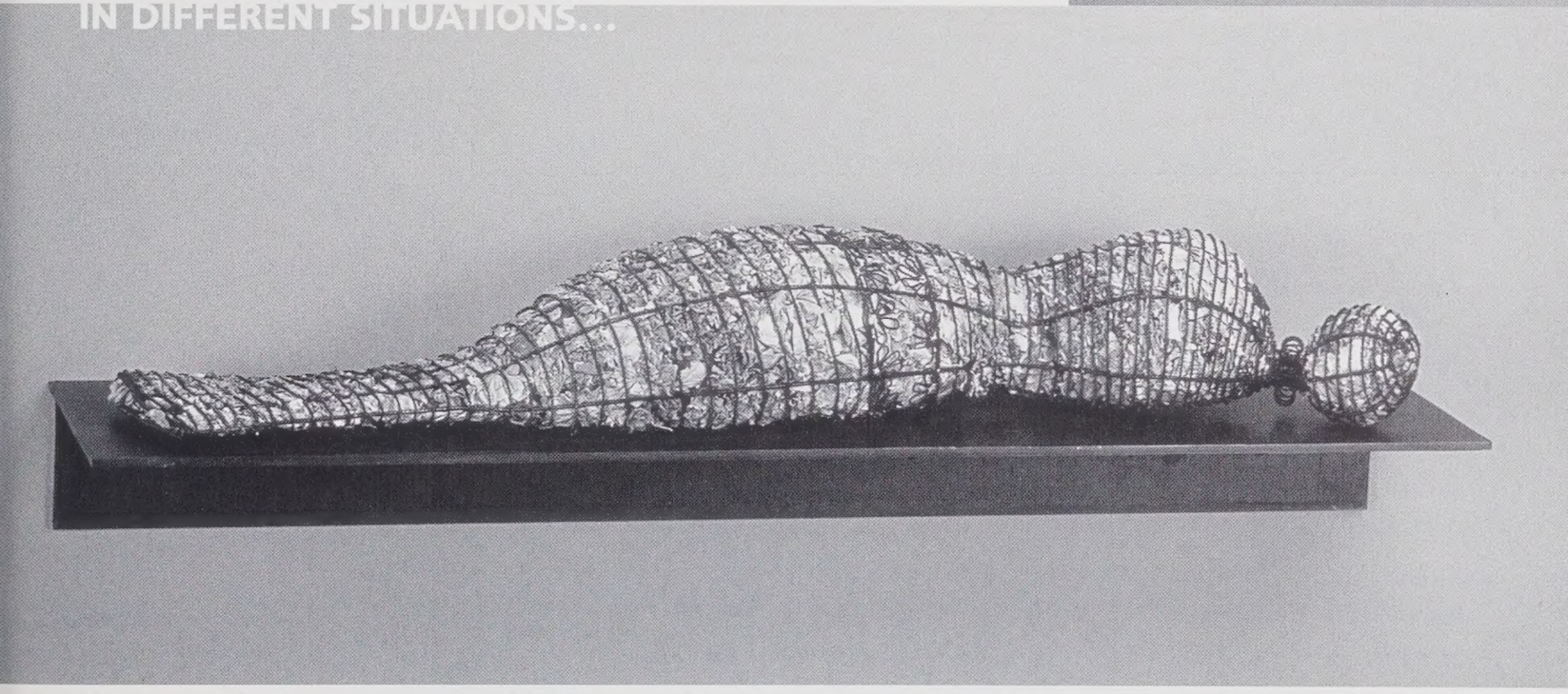
Charles Crowley

abundance of human existence: the organic matter was deteriorating even as it visually consumed the structure that held it.

Conversely the next pieces in the series, dating from 1996, have identical inner forms but varying contents. All have top-knots or heads, and are thus more distinctly figurative. The forged legs are elaborately ornamented, lending a feminine quality. *Petal: Benign* contains dried rose petals representing sentimental or romantic longings; *Rock: Hard* encases smooth, gray stones of unwavering strength; *Plastic: Impressionable* has shards of found colorful plastic with rough and pointed edges. These might be a self-portrait, or portraits of the same woman in different situations, each of which suggests the dominance of certain character traits.

Clark executes her pieces from concept to finishing details, weaving all of the wire herself. Hours of repetitive handiwork permit her valuable time for introspection, which she sees as underrated amidst the fast pace of contemporary times. Historically women have created many of the decorative arts, from the silk embroideries of the Middle Ages, to the Flemish tapestries of the fifteenth century, to Dutch lace from the seventeenth century. Since the 1970s, artists such as Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, and Lou Cabeen, have self consciously used techniques and materials typically associated with women's handiwork in the creation of fine art that comments on women's under recognized contributions to culture and society. Like these germinal works, Clark's pieces exist where historical decorative art and contemporary fine art intersect. She uses meditative,



labor-intensive techniques of hand crafting, but addresses contemporary concerns.

In fact, Clark admits that the heavy ornamentation and social restrictions of Victorian times have informed her work. The Victorian era, which spanned the reign of Queen Victoria in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1837-1901, carries the reputation of being bound by restrictive rules of social etiquette and a "more-is-more" aesthetic. It also spanned the years of the Industrial Revolution which brought on urbanization. While there were artistic innovations in France, British artists were relatively conservative. Even in some of the more radical circles of British art, such as The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of Painters, the artists looked back rather than forward with representational depictions of medieval and Shakespearean themes. Women partic-

ipated only to serve as models and offer emotional support. They received little recognition in their lifetimes, though many of them, Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal in particular, were talented poets in their own right.[2] Sexism was generally accepted.

This is exemplified by the writings of Irish-born George Moore (1852-1933), who attained a modest level of contemporary fame as an art critic, though posterity has not favored him. His *Modern Painting*, published in London in 1893, includes a generally favorable essay about painters Élisabeth Vigée Lebrun and Berthe Morisot. But even here he states, "Woman's nature is more facile and fluent than man's. Women do things more easily than men, but they do not penetrate below the surface, and if they attempt to do so the attempt is but a clumsy masquerade. . . . In her art woman is always in evening dress: there are flowers in her hair, and her fan waves to and fro, and she wishes to sigh in the ear of him who sits beside her. Her mental nudeness is parallel with her low bodice. . . . In music women have done no other, and in painting their achievement has been almost as slight."[3]

It is the Britain of Charlotte Bronte and George Moore that Clark has in mind when she speaks of her work as referring to the role of women in the Victorian era. Within this context Clark's *Warm Body*, 1997, takes on new meaning. What initially might be interpreted as a relaxed figure resting peacefully becomes a metaphorically dead one who has little impact on her surroundings, who is not taken seriously by her male contemporaries, constrained by a metal armature symbolizing an overly restrictive society. Indeed, she is merely a warm body.

The final and most successful of this four-legged series, where the legs pierce the forms violating the soft, fragile insides rather than buttressing them, suggest internal rupture or torment. Hair fills one, a parallel to the Victorian practice of filling locket pendants with the hair of a loved one. The others, *Wool (Ineffectual), Wool (Subservient),* and *Wool (Non-Committal)*, almost overflow with wool, a material of spinning, knitting, and women's work. Their ectoskeletens are heavily ornamented–tight, tiny swirls and tassels galore–the black metal a strong contrast to the creamy-colored wool, constricting it like a girdle. If the rigid, restrictive steel is male, then the soft, forgiving wool is female. In addition, the titles suggest imposed weakness and its frustrations. As Clark states, "The feeling of continually having to succumb tends to run through my work in a vein that hurts a little but is truly a part of life for me."

All of Clark's works from 1994-7, particularly *Wool (Subservient)*, resemble a corseted female form, which further strengthens the connection to Victorian times. The average corset reduced the waistline to around twenty-three inches and represented the feminine ideal: both erotic and moral. The 1886 issue of *La Vie Parisienne*, the *Playboy* of its day, includes an advertisement for this popular fashion devise that states: "The corset will live as long as the innate desire to please lives in woman's hearts."[4] Most historians interpret the wide-spread practice of tight-lacing as not only detrimental to women's health due to constriction of the inner organs, but also a reflection of the Victorian female's willingness to conform to a restrictive and even masochistic concept of beauty.

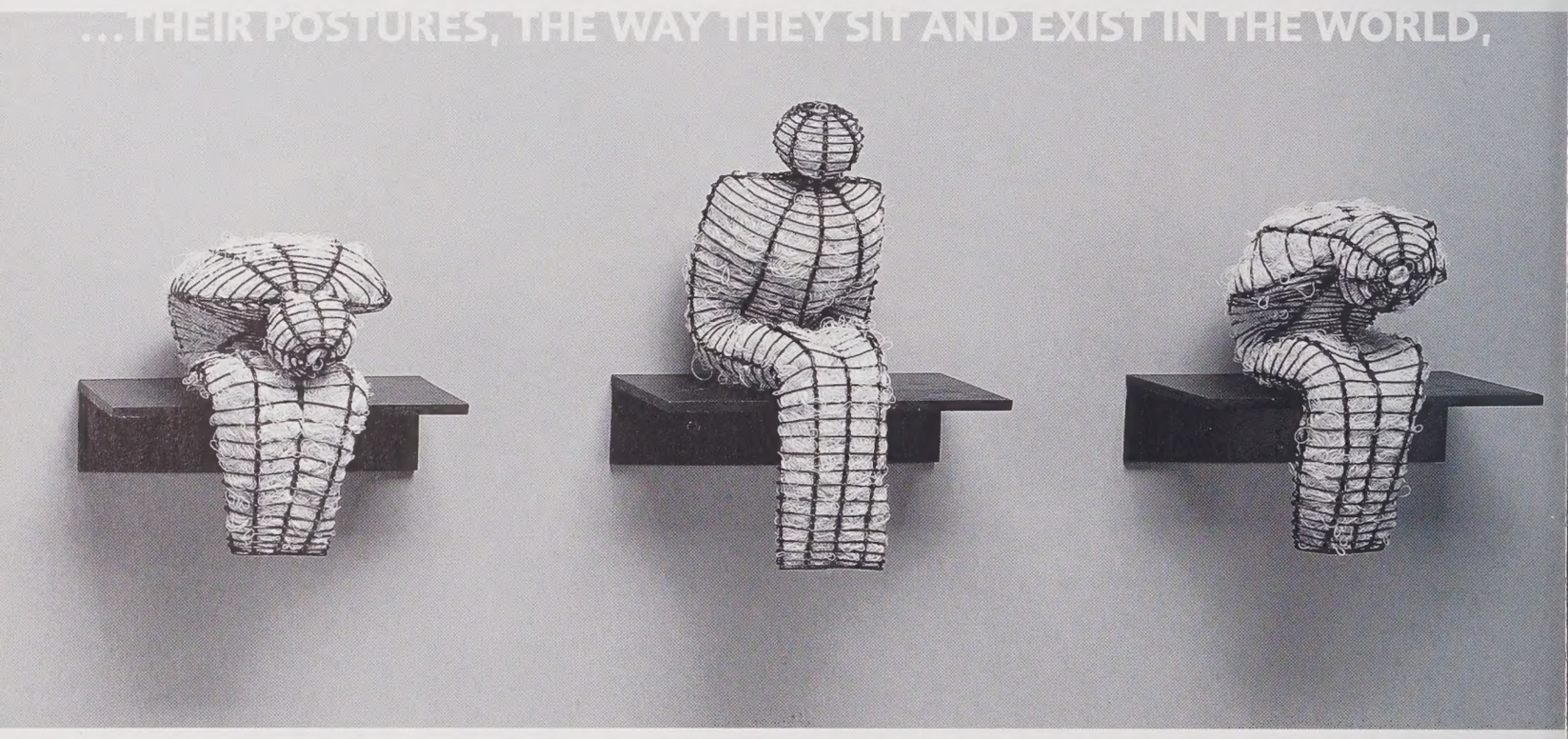
This allusion to subservience and Victorianism also applies to Clark's current, more literally figurative sculpture, which she presents on steel shelves. *She's Resting Comfortably Now*, 1998, filled with dried purple hydrangea petals, lies

this page
The Immaterial Insider, 1997
steel, wool
16 x 13 x 10"
Photograph by Bill Bachhuber

left
The Immaterial Insider (detail)

stretched out on its side on a steel shelf, gestureless and corpse-like. Here Clark conveys her understanding of Victorian medical practices. A doctor sedates a woman in less than perfect health, either not understanding or not admitting that her illness is likely due as much to emotional and psychological duress as to physical ailment. On the other hand, *Blanket*, created just prior to *She's Resting Comfortably Now*, lies folded at the waist, its knees almost touching its head, as if it's in pain. Clark seems to represent the same woman in both pieces. *Blanket* denotes her just prior to sedation. Along these lines, *Knowledge Within*, filled with shredded newspaper, conveys her in a pewter death mask. As in her previous body of work, the artist portrays an anonymous character in a variety of situations and emotional states.

It's Sad that You Feel that Way, Clark's most recent piece, is a grouping of three seated figures; their woven wire structures contain thread with the peachy color and softness of skin. They have more movement and expression than the others and, because they are in a group, they also convey interaction. In these, the most literal figures to date, Clark revives the more narrative quality of her sculptures from the early 1990s. And, like the constituent sculptures in *Differences,* their postures–the way they sit and exist in the world–suggest something about their inner



contents, their characters, and personalities. They also seem to be leaving the Victorian references behind. The decorative elements are few; the emphasis is more on sculptural shape and implied movement, resulting in a more contemporary sensibility. Clark cites Tony Craig, Eva Hesse, H.C. Westerman, Sigmar Polke, and Larry Rivers as artists she admires. Obviously, she embraces both abstract and figurative work, painting and sculpture.

Not only has Clark moved away from the heavy adornment of *Wool (Ineffectual), Wool (Subservient)*, and *Wool (Non-Committal)*, she is no longer forging any part of her sculptures. Forms that were once constricted, bound, and pierced now seem to be moving through their pain. *It's Sad that You Feel that Way* sets out towards new and uplifting territory. It continues from the last body of work because it acknowledges the uncertainty that is part of being human, but it also looks towards a brighter horizon, one marked by curiosity and growth. M

Kate Bonansinga has been a gallery director and consultant in Portland, Oregon. She presently is a critic and writer.

[1] Towards the beginning of Victorian times, English writer Charlotte Bronte created Jane Eyre, a spunky and largely autobiographical character. In chapter two of this famous book, Jane is 10 years old and commonly enraged by the taunting of the son of the mistress of the house. The nurse and Jane partake in this exchange after Jane defends herself against one of the son's physical attacks.

[2] In Pre-Raphaelite paintings, these women are depicted as wearing loose, flowing gowns, a radical departure from the established, corseted fashion of the day, indicating their progressiveness. That their poetry was unrecognized in their time is exemplified by a review in *The London Times* in 1873, "Whatever is said, the fact remains that the female mind has seldom or never produced poetry of the first order." See Isobel Armstrong, et. al. editors, *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 494.

[3] George Moore, "Sex in Art," *Modern Painting* as reprinted in Charles Harrison, et. al. editors, *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 773-4. Later on in this same essay, Moore quotes the painter Édouard Manet (1832-1883) as saying of Morisot, "My sister-in-law would not have existed without me." In reality, Morisot had a huge effect on Manet's adoption of the Impressionistic technique and his abandonment of black as part of his palette.

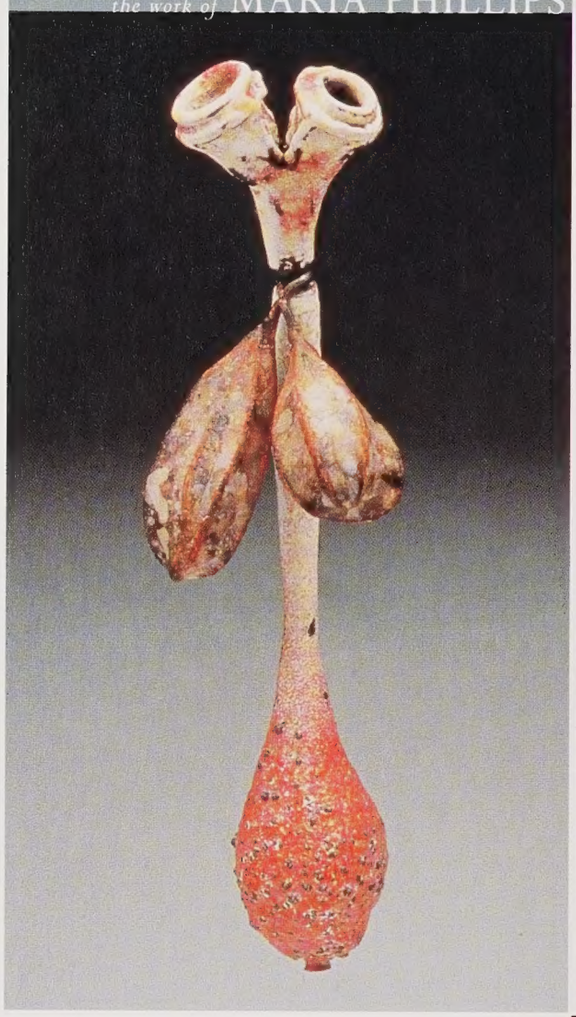
[4] Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 185.

left
It's Sad That You Feel That Way, 1998
steel, thread
9 x 7 x 37"
Photograph by Bill Bachhuber

above
It's Sad That You Feel That Way (detail)

OBSERVATIONS

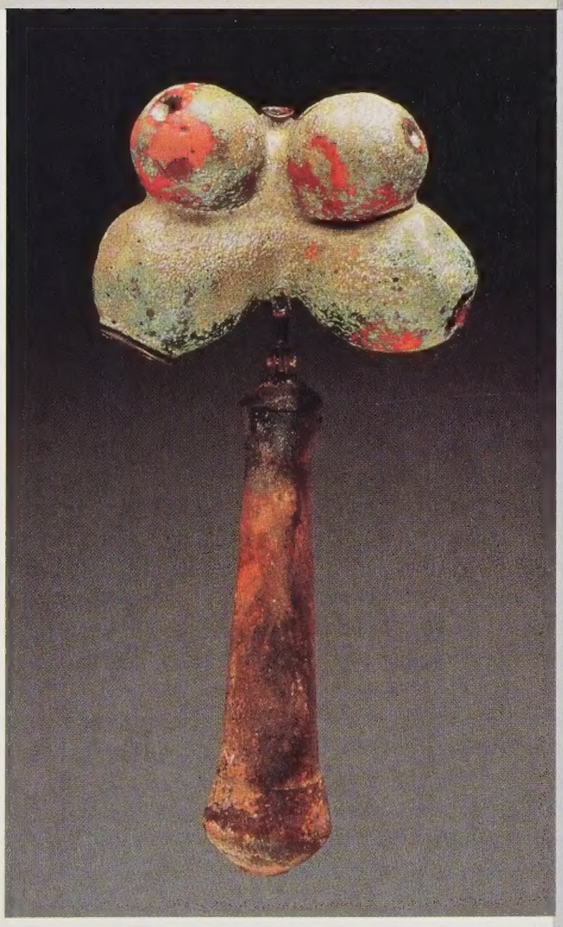
the work of MARIA PHILLIPS



There is a precise and poignant irony that exists in fine metalwork which owes its inspiration to natural forms. On one hand, one may be struck by the facile success of the representation, the perfect translation of the dried and delicate skin of a plant into obdurate metal and crystalline enamel. On the other hand, there is a painful awareness of the failure of the copy, a failure marked by its very permanence. The perfectly crafted copy mocks our mortality with its stubborn refusal of decay and contingency.

The metalwork of Maria Phillips finds its success in such paradoxical epiphanies. Holding these objects seems to ward off, for a moment, the tenuousness of our fragile existence, as if the solidity of the objects in our grasp guarantees our own solid and sure existence. The clarity of texture and the confident resilience of the steel allows us to squeeze the form, hard, like pinching ourselves to insure that we are awake, a gesture that would destroy a *real* pod or branch. In Phillips's work one can hold onto a passing moment, weigh a form glimpsed beneath a tangle of dried leaves. And maybe there is also some solace in observing how the ever-changing processes of nature are fixed for a moment in the rational mind, like the clarity of a scientific model in biology class.

But finally it all comes back to the impossibility of such permanence. The skill and painstaking labor of the artist is futile at warding off mortality. Yet it is that very futility which captures the most human of all feelings. For a moment time stops and the artist allows us to hold nature and thus ourselves fixed in time.



opposite page

left
Statis
enamel, coper, steel, gut
5 1/2 x 1 1/2 x 1 1/2"

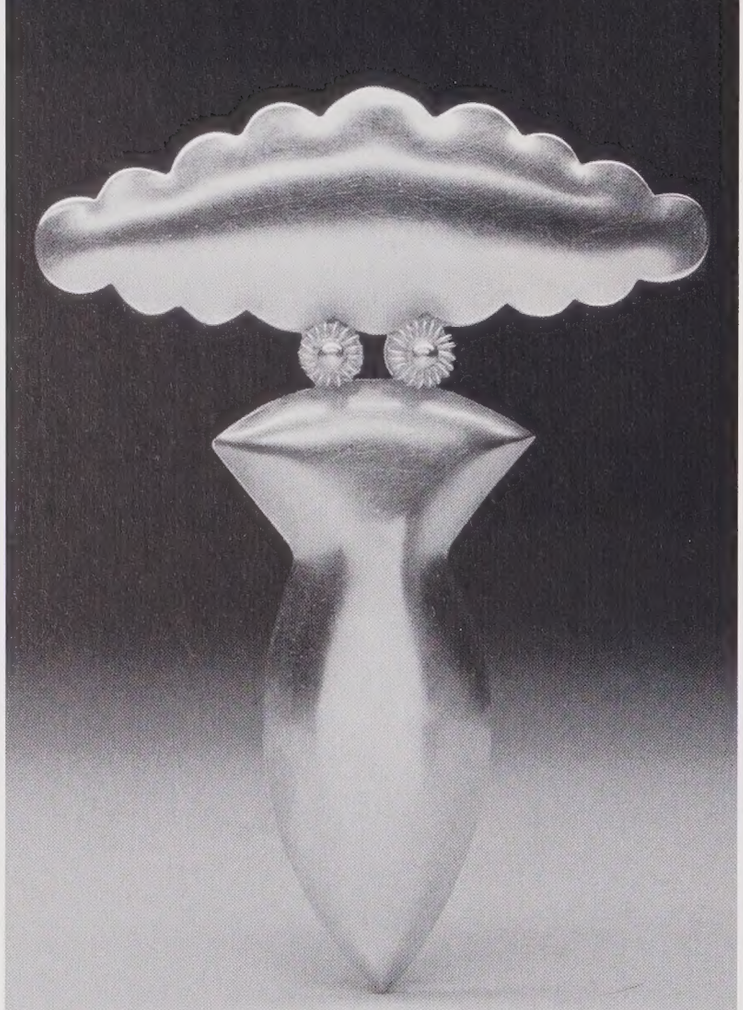
bottom
Gharba
steel, gut, seeds
20 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/2"

this page

top left
Cyclic (neckpiece)
steel, gut, silver
34 x 7 x 2"

left
Pudenda
enamel, copper, steel
5 x 2 1/2 x 1"

top right
Enigma (brooch)
copper, enamel, steel
4 x 2 x 1"



PAMELA RITCHIE
IMAGINARY PLACES

MOUNT SAINT VINCENT UNIVERSITY
ART GALLERY
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA
JANUARY 10 - MARCH 1, 1998

text by **JAMES ROBSON**

left
Pamela Ritchie
Brooch, 1997
sterling, 18k, 24k
$4^{1}/_{16} \times {}^{7}/_{8} \times {}^{7}/_{16}$"

above
Pamela Ritchie
Fish and Cloud Brooch, 1997
sterling, 18k
$2^{1}/_{4} \times 3 \times {}^{7}/_{16}$"

In an earlier collection of work, *Concatenation*, Ritchie explored the linking of forms and the consequent association of ideas. Ten of the pieces included in this exhibition are from that collection and serve to contextualize Ritchie's recent work as a logical continuation of her exploration of such connections. However, thirty-six new pieces have expanded her exploration to include time and place; and the relationship between traditional process and contemporary ideas has emerged as an important element in her work.

In 1979, just prior to entering the master's programme at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, Ritchie received a Research Award from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. This award allowed her to spend a year in Norway where she focused on researching and making jewellery in a variety of strictly traditional forms. The work in this exhibition draws extensively on the techniques and design elements she encountered there. Most striking is the way the artist incorporates these techniques in decidedly non-traditional applications.

The use of historical content has long been Ritchie's primary strategy for design. When she was a student at N.S.C.A.D. in 1972, a professor criticized her for her use of historicism. She felt this criticism to be invalid, and in reaction she was spurred on to a much deeper analysis of the idea that the past can be a rich and varied source of design stimuli. This approach has been integral to her work since that time. Ritchie feels strongly that historicism is not merely a borrowing or rehashing of that which has already been done, but an important method of establishing a point of departure from which exploration can proceed.

In *Imaginary Places*, the most evident example of this approach is the way Ritchie has removed filigree from its traditional decorative application and used it to create unexpected forms rich in detail, texture, and content. Never an easy technique, its use in many of these pieces is further complicated by the fineness of the wire and the size and mass of the piece to which it is applied. Utilizing copper, bronze, and predominantly silver, Ritchie demonstrates a mature mastery of goldsmithing skills. Her flawless execution of difficult techniques is understated and serves to present a clear and epigrammatic image–not merely to extol technique.

The forms that Ritchie uses in a variety of combinations represent specific foods and plants: beans, eggs, buns, lotus, fish, poppy, and sea cucumber. The artist's choice of how to combine them in any particular piece creates a duality, or more often a multiplicity, of intent and/or perceptual possibility. These images were chosen for their significance to Ritchie, yet the deeply personal experiences, concerns, and developments they refer to are not unique to her alone. The images are therefore able to reach out and involve the viewer on a personal level as well.

In each piece these images remain separate and individual, while at the same time harmonizing to allow logical, yet sometimes surprising, interconnected relationships. A brooch where a formally stylized lotus sits atop the shape of a fish may illustrate a relationship between western and eastern culture. But the images, and their relationships, may also refer to the foods themselves or even to the religious associations they often symbolize. Another brooch displays a cloud form floating above, yet connected to, a fish. Is this a whimsical dreaming of fishing on a summer day or a questioning of what *does* free us to dream? And can the release of dreaming even be found when one's primary concern is simply to find enough food to survive? With similar ambiguity the recurrent use of the poppy flower can be seen as a charming decorative element that enhances the dream-like quality of some of the pieces; a comment on the importance of the poppy in the economies of many eastern counties or a reference to the greed, violence, and

destructive consequences resulting from the international trade in opium.

Ritchie's pieces are often somber in tone, with dark patinas of black and deep browns used extensively. The result, particularly when combined with highly formal and traditional gemsetting techniques such as square bezel and channel setting, can be reminiscent of Victorian mourning jewellery. At the same time very different interpretations are suggested. For example, in a series of six brooches composed of a stylized poppy sitting atop a bean, the resultant images are evocative of the female form. When this shape is combined with the black colour and formally set cubic zirconia, a woman's "basic black dress" and diamonds are brought to mind. Yet the images also reflect a celebration of life which overlays the sadness of death. Certainly, the generally sober quality of the work is overridden by the sense of hope and optimism evoked by the visual upward thrust created by the way the forms are combined–again, a multiplicity of interpretation.

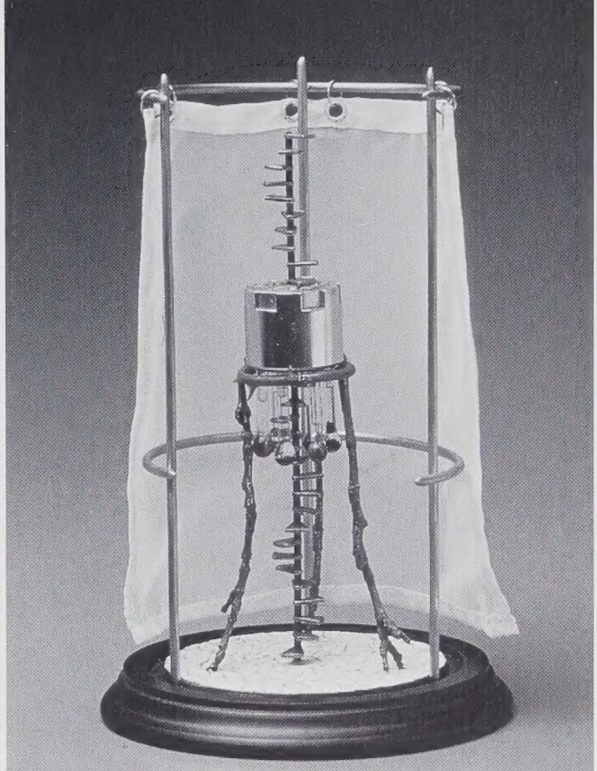
The installation of this exhibition, largely conceived and executed by the artist, demonstrates the same understated precision and attention to detail embodied in the work. Pieces are displayed elevated by rectangular platforms composed of dozens of layers of brown/black felt, underscoring the theme of multiplicity of possibilities. While these platforms could have created supports that were massive and overpowering, Ritchie's careful attention to proportion, colour, and texture has provided a backdrop that serves to softly isolate each piece, allowing the viewer an opportunity to form an intimate connection with the work.

There is a shadowy quality to both the finish of the pieces and their installation that parallels one's shifting perception of the images, the same way a landscape alters dramatically as rapidly moving clouds cross the sun, the view changing as a different light falls on the scene.

The mottled felt provides an earthlike base from which the forms seem to sprout; ethereal and dreamlike images emerging from the more earthly elements as if nurtured by them. The multi-directional quality of the fibers of the fabric seems a visual extension of the controlled, soft, matte finish Ritchie has achieved on her work, and the hues and shades serve to pick up and echo the patinas employed on the pieces. The same felt was used in the wall cases, both as an overall backdrop and in smaller applied sections that break up the area in a sensitive relationship to the work it supports.

The lasting impression of *Imaginary Places* is one of completeness of thought. M

James Robson is a goldsmith and part-time faculty member of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.



ARTISTS OF A DIFFERENT CALIBER

HEWLETT GALLERY,
CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
NOVEMBER 3 - 23, 1997

CHARLES A. WUSTUM
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
RACINE, WISCONSIN
FEBRUARY 22 - APRIL 19, 1998

text by MARY THOMAS

For *Artists of a Different Caliber*, an exceptional exhibition that addresses the issue of gun violence, sixty-six metal artists created works that subverted original function by enervating weapons collected in a local "Goods for Guns" buy-back program and re-forming them as art. Following the exhibition's premier at Carnegie Mellon University's Hewlett Galley in Pittsburgh, twenty-eight of these artworks are traveling to other venues.

Organizers Elizabeth Argo and Lucy Stewart, curatorial and educational assistants respectively at the Carnegie Museum of Art, and metal artist Boris Bally sent a gun to each artist who responded to a national call for entries. Time constraints and a limited pool of materials meant that artists did not know what their guns would be made of, and Stewart received reports of hundreds of broken saw blades and of base metals melting during soldering.

All the more remarkable, then, is the high standards of the resultant works which reflect the technical proficiency of and time invested by the participants. The show's jurors were Philadelphia independent curator and writer Gail Brown, Carnegie Museum of Art Curator of Decorative Arts Sarah Nichols, and Don Stuart, President of SNAG and Professor of Jewelry and Metals at Georgian College, Ontario, Canada.

This endeavor is an example of how artists can address important social issues without compromising the integrity of their artworks. Also noteworthy is the way the artists naturally conflate issues such as art/craft, high/low, and appropriateness of material by intuitively following process.

There is a rewarding diversity of representations, styles, and messages addressed. Guns are displayed both straightforwardly and elusively in pieces that are sculptural, assembled, kinectic, and conceptual. Employing various traditions of craft, decoration, and fine art, for the most part the works avoid obvious and didactic solutions.

First place was awarded to Kirsten Rook for her enigmatic *Ascend and Remember*, in which a bullet chamber containing tear-shaped glass vials in each chamber is suspended within a bronze crown of thorns over an eggshell mosaic. A fine silt of blowing ash ritualistically covers this simple dark sacrifice.

Mickey Johnston received honorable mention for a faultlessly formed gun barrel bracelet accessorized with five meticulously crafted, bejeweled charms. Third place Sarah Hall's skeletal crucified figure conjoined with gun parts, *E-Pistolary Ghost*, is striking and sombering, and one of many works that incorporated religious symbolism.

Among many other notable pieces were Boris Bally's *One Easy Shot* in which a prickly gun forms the goblet handle in this snappy visual and verbal pun; Melissa Davenport's *Urban Plaything*, a handgun that rests seductively in a satin-lined school box, its chamber filled with brightly colored candies; and Keith Lo Bue's sophisticated *Reason or Instinct* with references to the nature/nurture debate.

A spiralbound catalogue that includes jurors' statements and photographs of fifty of the works is a handsome record of this laudable effort. Proceeds from its sale and the sale of the works will benefit the Pittsburgh "Goods for Guns" program which offers a $50 gift certificate for food or toys in exchange for any firearm, no questions asked. M

Mary Thomas is a writer and a freelance art critic for the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*.

above
Kirsten Rook
Ascend and Remember, 1997
handgun bullet chamber, sterling, nickel silver, bronze, hand blown glass, ashes, dust, saltwater, beeswax, fabric, wood, eggshells
8 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"

ANCIENT GOLD:
THE WEALTH OF THE THRACIANS, TREASURES FROM THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

THE SAINT LOUIS MUSEUM OF ART
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI
FEBRUARY 6 - APRIL 5, 1998

text by AGNES PAL

A traveling exhibition from the Republic of Bulgaria that opened its door on February 6, 1998 at The Saint Louis Art Museum, is currently making its way across the United States. The assemblage is the result of some of the most important archeological finds of its kind, though the objects have surfaced only within the last hundred years.

Though recent discoveries in the 1970s and 1980s threw the spotlight on these ancient treasures, only a few of them ever have been seen outside Bulgaria. The exhibition features more than 200 objects from royal Thracian burial sights and other finds of Thracian origin.

The Thracians were a people who in ancient times lived north of Greece, in an area predominantly in present-day Bulgaria. Up until the last few decades the modern world had no first hand knowledge of the Thracians and relied on the written accounts of their neighbors, the Greeks, Persians, and Romans, for information on the Thracians and their legendary metal working skill. When they went to battle the Thracians dressed their horses and themselves in gold and silver armor to dazzle their enemies. Homer sang of the Thracians' heroes, fierce warriors, fabled kings in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This is how he described the Thracian king, Rhesos, an ally of Troy:

> If you are bent on raiding a Trojan company,
> yonder are Thracians just arrived,
> far out on the left wing, apart from everyone.
> Their king is Rhesos Eionides,
> his horses the most royal I have seen, whiter
> than snow and swift as the seawind.
> His chariot is a masterwork in gold and silver,
> and the armor, huge and golden,
> brought by him here is marvelous to see, like
> no war-gear of man but of immortals...
>
> Homer, *Iliad*, Book X , 433-441
> Translation: Robert Fitzgerald

Still later, Greek and Latin historians such as Herodotus picked up on the legends of the Thracian Kings. But since the Thracians had no written language of their own it was difficult to verify the historical facts. Now the Thracians finally have begun to speak to us through the uncovered treasures and drawings on the walls of their burial chambers which make us feel their presence again.

The gold and silver objects survived time gracefully. Among the items on exhibit are many royal ceremonial objects of silver and 24k gold, such as *rhyta* and *phialae*. A *rhyton* is a pouring vessel with an opening near the lower end, which can allow a thin stream of wine to flow into a *phiale*, a shallow cup resembling a saucer, having a central boss and used for drinking. The Thracians used these objects in rituals to communicate with their gods. There is also jewelry worn by Thracian rulers and powerful citizens, royal scepters, armor, gold and silver parures to decorate the bridals for their horses and chariots. Some of the uncovered objects, like the ones from the Varna necropol, are believed to be among the earliest examples of worked gold, and date from the fifth millennium BCE. Others date from as late as the time of the Roman empire. The exhibition is organized in groups that identify the pieces according to the location where they were discovered. The Vulchitrun treasures contain gold lids dating from 1500 BCE that have dark scroll motifs done in niello inlay, a black enamel-like alloy of sulfur and silver. The knobs are embellished with a hammered, meandering silver design made of thin silver sheet. The same site also yielded a very unusual triple-form vessel, also dating from 1500 BCE. It is composed of three identical ovoid shapes formed of gold sheets and soldered together. The vessel in the middle is joined to the outer ones by tubes made of electrum, a gold and silver alloy, soldered to openings near the bottom of each so liquid could freely flow and mix between them. At their rounded ends each of the three is attached to an elaborate handle that is also made of electrum tubes and is inlaid with niello. The shapes of the three vessels resemble ducks. It is believed by some experts that each had a lid which may have been hinged. The vessel may have been used to mix the sacred drink, or *kykeyon*.

Many of the objects are laden with fine decorative motifs, and still more bear the most amazing allegorical illustrations modeled in relief or engraved. An unusual shallow gilt silver dish evokes the mythological story of the seduction of Auge by Heracles. Exquisitely rendered on a barely eight centimeter in diameter disk we see the story unfold. A young woman looks adoringly at a seated, bearded, still strong older man. She is bent slightly towards him as they hold onto each other. Wrestling to get away, at the same time she smiles seductively. The woman is wearing earrings, a diadem, and a sandal and an ankle bracelet on her right foot. The man is wearing a wreath on his head and a ram's skin on his lap, and next to him is an equisitely decorated quiver. Both figures are modeled in anatomically correct details, the man is shown frontally with his left leg thrust forward and expertly foreshortened. Straining on one arm to hold the bulk of his back, the veins on his forearms bulge. The image is chased in much detail in low relief, skillfully showing the texture and folds of the cloth and the curly strands of their hair.

An exceptionally fine piece of jewelry, an amphora pendant on a roman chain from the fourth century BCE, can also be seen on exhibit. The pendant hangs on a pendulum chain with a second amphora shape. About mid-way the chain is interrupted by a curious object, a remarkably detailed tiny human mask with its tongue stuck out. The larger of the two amphora pendants is decorated with six petal rosettes and

exemplifies the finest granulation work. This previously unpublished piece was found in the Kazanluk district in a tomb near Shipka.

A silver, gilt *phiale* from the end of the fifth century BCE is decorated with a band of well drawn engraved images. Four four-horse chariots are shown in a race. A charioteer and a warrior ride in each vehicle. The warrior is dressed battle-ready, in chain mail, greaves, helmet, and shield. The four helmets can be identified by the differences in their style. Two are Chalcidian type, the other two are Corinthian and Thracian type. In their chariots the charioteers lunge forward, almost leaping out of their seats, reins taunt in their hands. In rows of four leaping as one, the horses are shown with their tails in horizontal waves, the result of their incredible speed.

The most unique pieces on display belong to the Panagyurishte find, containing nine gold *rhyta* and a large *phiale*. The pieces in this group are very special because they display such high level of artistry and craftsmanship. It is interesting that many of the images with which the *rhyta* are decorated are Greek in origin. They represent Greek mythological characters and resemble in style the friezes of the temples from Athens of the period. The most unusual vessel in the group is the large *amphora-rhyton* with the two handles surmounted by two magnificent centaurs. On one side of the vessel we see two men divining from the internal organs of an animal the older man holds in his hand. On the other side are men in action, storming a house.

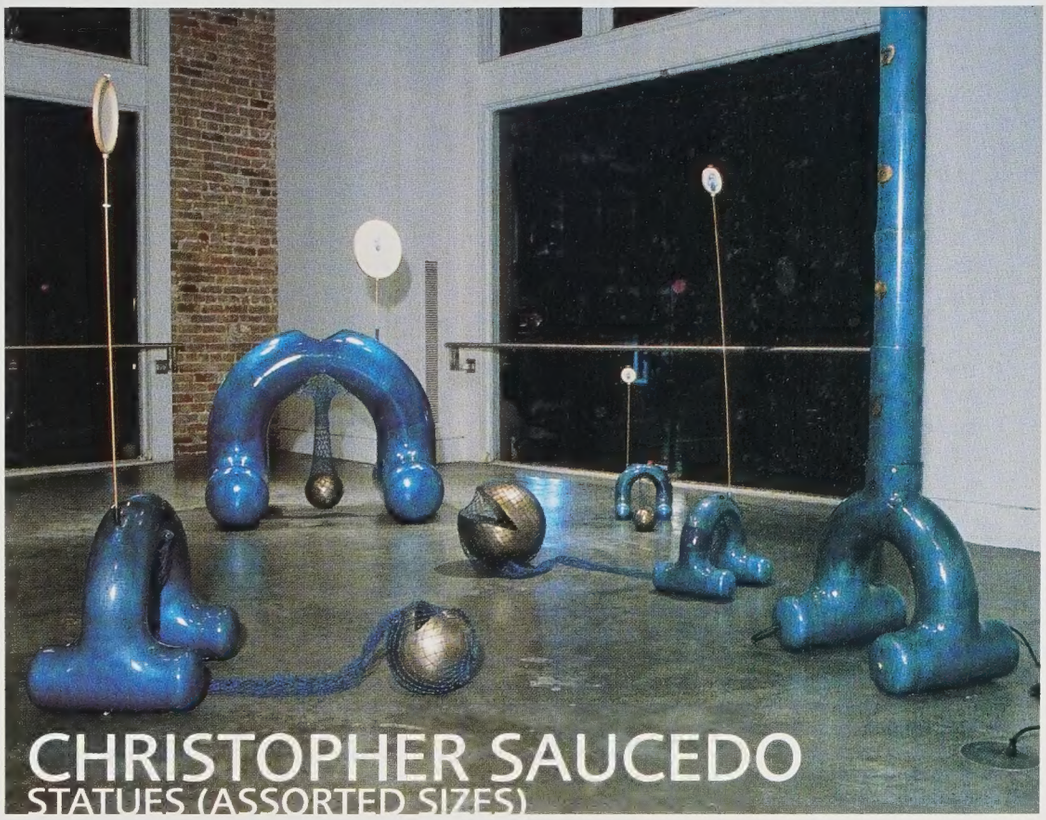
The large majority of the pieces and certainly the most beautifully executed and most complex objects presented in the show date from the fifth-century BCE to the late fourth-century BCE. The artistry and skill of the Thracian masters leaves one in amazement and awe. Many visitors to the exhibit–including this one–found their accomplishments puzzling. What kind of tools and discipline could have enabled their level of accomplishment? Since the *rhyta* or pouring vessels found are often made to represent human and animal figures in the classic style, resembling the statues of neighboring Greece, it is safe to make a connection. The question might be who influenced whom. M

Agnes Pal is a writer who lives in Carbon, Illinois.

far left
Rhyton, 4th century BCE
gold
5 5/16"
Panagyurishte Archaeological Museum, Plovdiv

left
Amphora-Rhyton, 4th century BCE
gold
11 7/16"
Panagyurishte Archaeological Museum, Plovdiv

All photographs provided by The Trust for Museum Exhibitions.



CHRISTOPHER SAUCEDO
STATUES (ASSORTED SIZES)

THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
JUNE 6 - JULY 19, 1998
text by DOROTHY JOINER

Painted an electric aqua, Christopher Saucedo's *Statues (Assorted Sizes)* 1998, are not really statues at all, but rather abstracted forms: steel half-*statues*, resting on chunky horizontal cylinders, like pieces of sausage. Emerging from the accompanying arches is dyed-to-match netting holding bronze balls, each notched and the size of a half-circle hollowed out of its arch at the top. The work begins with a teasing study in scale and proportion. Each statue is half the size of its predecessor; the smallest has the largest ball, and the largest trails the smallest ball. In contrast to the earth-bound statues is a tower made of telescoping aluminum cylinders, topped with a red light and affixed with six different bronze fruits and a pretzel.

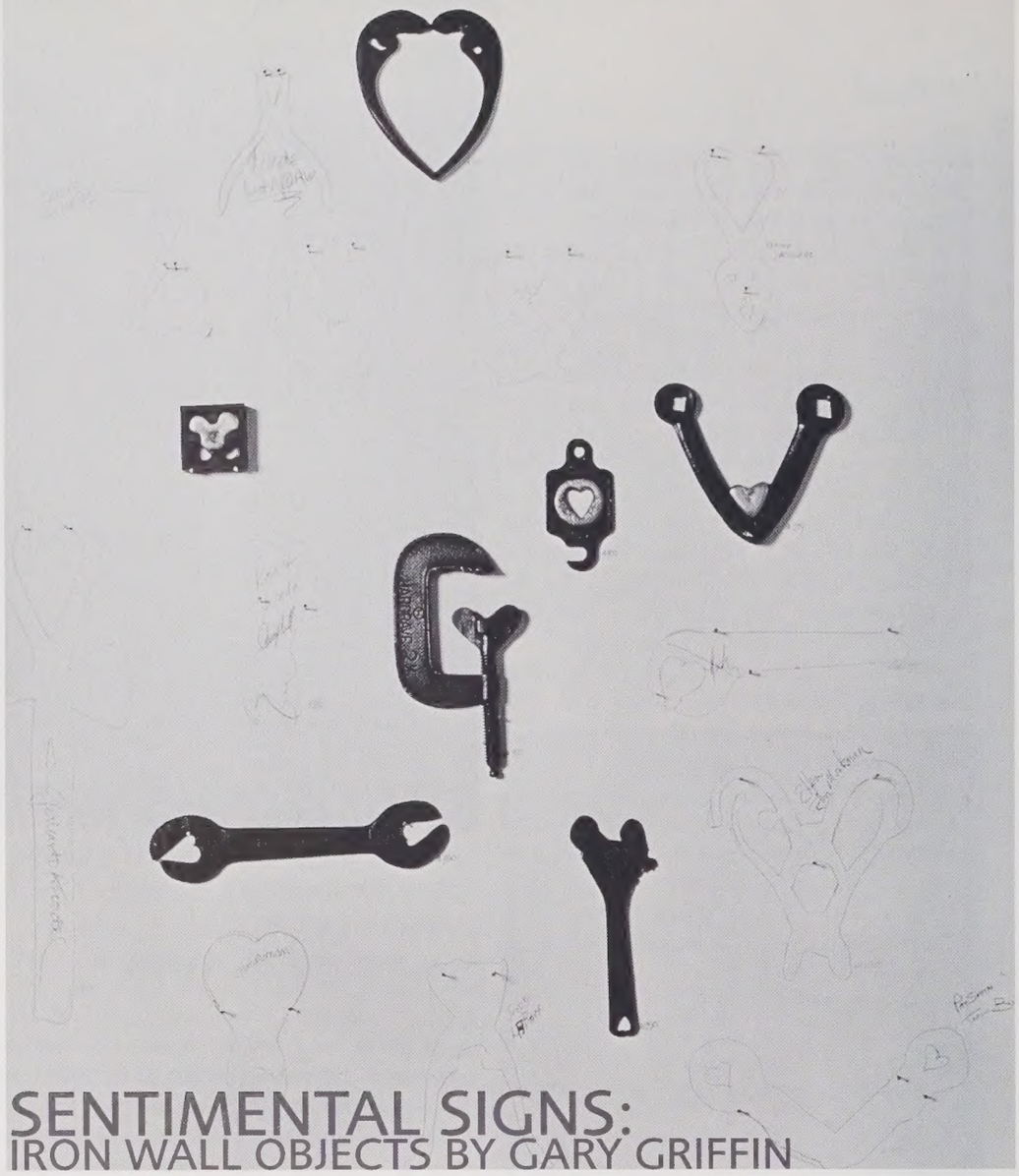
Conceptualized shapes and the formalist play on size belie, however, Saucedo's ludic freedom of allusion, ranging from the erudite to the popular. The notched balls, a deferential salute to Brancusi, also share a less highbrow progenitor: Aubrey Beardsley's ink drawing of three provincial men standing naked, the smallest of whom sports the most significant testes, and the largest of whom owns the smallest. In addition to conflating Beardsley's bawdiness with the platonic tendencies of Modernism, Saucedo accentuates this cerebral archetypal frolic by contrasting the masculine tower to the netting, which suggests feminine container images. Far less sophisticated are the veiled references to *Pacman*, the '70s figure from a video arcade game, who gobbled fruit prizes while eluding enemies trying to capture him.

And the play continues. On each statue is what the artist calls a "thought bubble," a circle of paper held up by a stick, stamped with a prototypical image of the configuration: net, ball, and all. Because of its constancy in size, the image offsets the exercise in proportion and scale elsewhere in the work. As a symbol, on the other hand, it is a kind of self-image–obviously inaccurate. The largest statue thinks of itself, as it were, in the same terms as does the smallest.

With lighthearted abandon, Saucedo synthesizes diverse, even contradictory elements: Modernist formal purity, ribald wit transmuted into archetypal symbols, a pedestrian computer game, together with a dash of popular psychology. Sorting out the allusions makes for fun, but looking at the work is even more engaging. M

Dorothy Joiner is the coordinator of International Programs at the State University of West Georgia.

above
Christopher Saucedo
Statues (Assorted Sizes), 1998
galvanized steel, cast aluminum, cast bronze, paper, net, light bulb

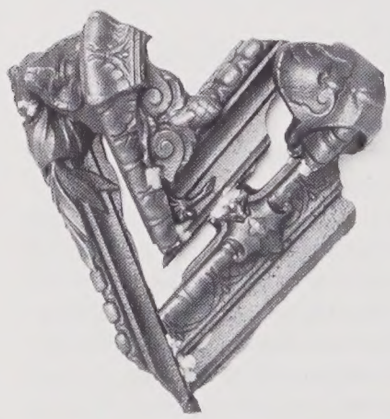


SENTIMENTAL SIGNS:
IRON WALL OBJECTS BY GARY GRIFFIN

WEARLEY STUDIO GALLERY
ROYAL OAK, MICHIGAN
JANUARY 24th - MARCH 28th, 1998

text by NICOLE JACQUARD

***Sentimental Signs* was an exhibition of the latest work by Professor Gary S. Griffin, Artist in Residence and head of the Department of Metalsmithing at the Cranbrook Academy of Art.** This body of work was comprised of 115 heart



shaped wall pieces made from sheet metal, poured pewter, old or used tools, hinges, and broken antique planters. The objects were arranged salon style, five to ten pieces in a group, and explored the basic design principles of balance, repetition, rhythm, proximity, movement, positive and negative space, and quality of line. The works were displayed in groupings emphasizing their simplicity, inventiveness, and delicacy. The idea of using the heart form came from the hearts Professor Griffin makes every year to hang on the family's front porch in Bloomfield Hills. The majority of Griffin's previous work had been extremely labor intensive and methodically planned from start to finish. With this exhibition, the artist was able to utilize the basic heart shape and explore the many possibilities and combinations. He set aside time every Saturday, from eight until twelve noon, to produce heart shapes, and as his ideas materialized, the execution became more rapid and spontaneous, allowing increasing freedom in creation and execution.

I was immediately struck by the central theme of the heart and how this exhibition related to the idea of signs, symbols, or even *Signals*, the show Professor Griffin curated in conjunction with the *Messengers of Modernism* exhibition last January at the Cranbrook Museum of Art. After talking to Griffin, I was surprised to find out that the impetus behind the show had nothing to do

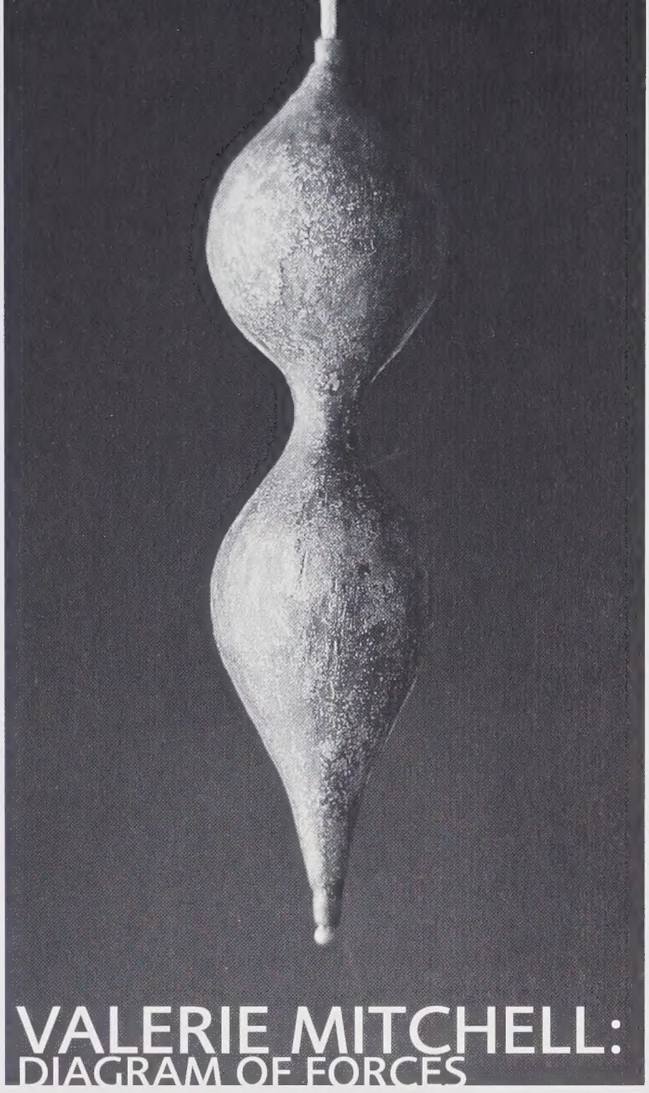
with any of the above ideas. Rather, at its inception was the notion of commerce and the business atmosphere created when there is an exchange of goods for money. And the art gallery, with its negotiations concerning such commodities, was to be the setting. With most gallery exhibitions there is a routine for the merchant and consumer: An individual visits the exhibition, becomes interested in a piece of work, and if he or she decides to purchase it, a red dot is all that remains as evidence. *Sentimental Signs* was a conscious effort to add to this experience by actively involving the patrons as they entered the door. As I entered the exhibition I was given a pencil by Ben Wearley along with the instructions, "If you are interested in one of the pieces please either draw or trace your selection where it is on the wall, sign your name, remove your piece, and find one of our sales people to ring you up."

Griffin made the comparison of going to a concert: "There is a price of admission, there is an exchange of a performance, and the audience responds. With that response there is visible evidence of a shared experience." At the opening of *Sentimental Signs* the audience was circling the exhibition to view not only the pieces on display, but the evolving show as the pieces were bought and disappeared, leaving only the patron's tracing and signature. The result was that they were not only taking part in the opening, but as pieces were removed, they physically became integral to the exhibition with their drawings, along with their names and messages, adorning the vacant wall space.

The most successful exhibitions I have attended were either conceived, designed, or installed by artists. Gary Griffin made the conscious effort to reject the traditional mold of the art opening. *Sentimental Signs* was a unique exhibition in that it relied on the patrons' interaction and invited them to become part of the finished work, leaving behind their own impressions of the hearts they took with them. M

Nicole Jacquard is an artist and international correspondent, living and working in Rochester, Michigan.

left
Gary Griffin
Sentimental Signs (detail and installation view), 1998
Sheet metal, poured pewter, tools, hinges, antique planters
Photograph by Thomas Frank, MFA



VALERIE MITCHELL: DIAGRAM OF FORCES

JEWELERS'WERK GALERIE,
WASHINGTON, DC.
SEPTEMBER 18 - OCTOBER 19, 1997

text by **MARJORIE SIMON**

Valerie Mitchell likes to look "close and deep," and when she casts her penetrating gaze around her the result is a fresh appreciation of biomorphic forms that would be revealed to the rest of us, if only we too would slow down and look. The two dozen pieces gathered at Jewelers'werk Galerie seem to exist somewhere near the intersection of nature and industry. That is, they are definitely organic, but they seem worked over as well, as if bones were to become pipes.

Carved, bark-like weathered surfaces cover turnips, pods, and leaves. A necklace of molten, fig-shaped globes makes me think of autumnal colors, fallen acorns, chestnuts, or other seeds fallen in a pile of loamy leaves. In fact, although their organic references are easy to read, the forms are abstracted enough that they produce multiple associations. They're primitive, in the way that flaked obsidian or arrowheads are primitive forms not far removed from natural ones. Only *Marine Pendant*, with its green enamel crust, seemed a little forced.

The most powerful image in the tiny gallery was a horizontal neckpiece hung a little off the wall at an angle. A shadow dwarfs the piece, and because the lighting is from above, the shadow cast below becomes almost like a supporting shelf. In fact, all the shadows make slightly different shapes, and the resulting mirroring of forms sets up a ghostly dialogue.

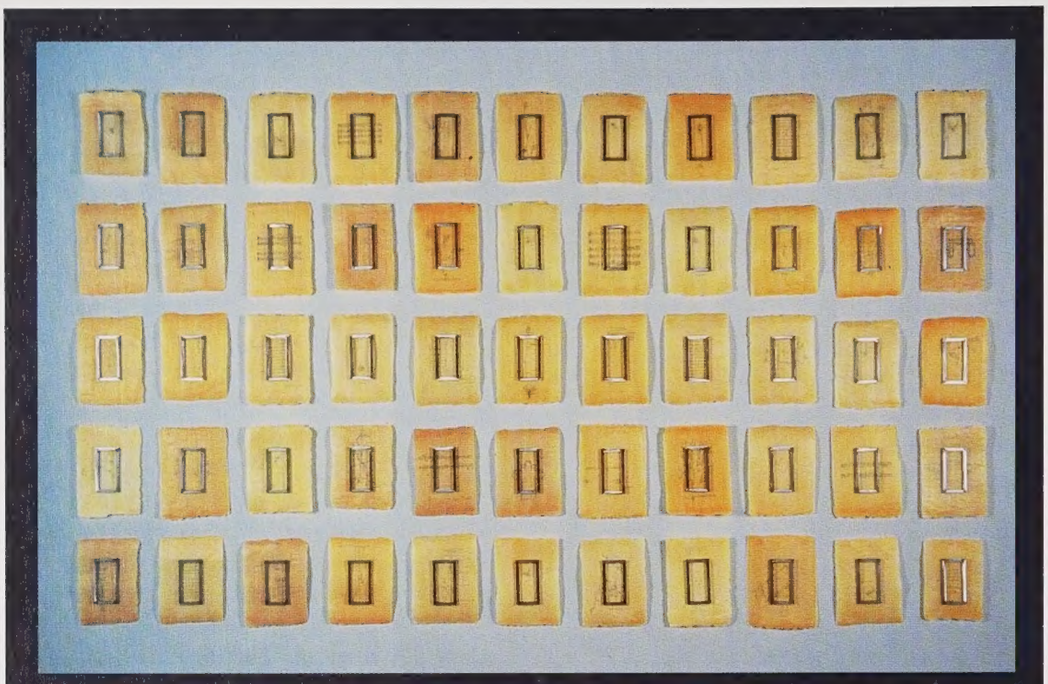
It is easy to imagine the objects' origins as malleable wax squeezed into shape in Mitchell's hands before being electroformed to create shells that seem improbably light for their size. Surfaces are scratched and gouged, then patinaed or enameled. Skeletal structures may be filled with cement. Nearly half the pieces make effective use of enamel in completely non-traditional ways. The enamel covers the surface of the closed form, but not always entirely, or with oxidation showing through a transparent green, as if the mossy seed pod were dipped in ice. In *Edge Pendant* three flared tiers like mushroom skirts end in an elongated bulb about the shape of something soft held in the mouth. Opaque white enamel, morphing into greens and blues at different thicknesses, only partly covers the metal, as if snow had been scraped from a lichen-covered tree growth.

Mitchell's jewelry presses up against the boundary of wearability and often comes up a little outside of it, Not that the work isn't body-scaled, for it is, but it announces its presence to you and assumes its autonomy. Her attention to form makes her assertive with it; she is one of those jewelers who really does make sculpture to wear. The many pendants really PEND, bulbous and fecund, like tree galls, gnarled organ sacs, or giant blisters. Hung on slender cables that seem almost too tenuous to hold them, there is much tension in each structure. They don't seem so much active as action about to happen, a kind of breath-holding moment just before something might squeeze out of them.

These unduloids and pods occasionally reminded me of something indigestible my cat left on the floor. But I suspect Mitchell wouldn't mind even that association, as she seems to embrace the entire natural world, making leaves animate and cells knowable. M

Marjorie Simon is a metalsmith and a critic who lives in Highland Park, New Jersey. She presently is the chairperson of *Metalsmith*'s Editorial Advisory Committee.

above
Valerie Mitchell
Double Sphere Pendant
copper, patina
5" long



left
Beverly Penn
Testatment (series in progress), 1996-7
graphite, beeswax, steel
12 x 9" (each panel)

below
Nancy Megan Corwin
Crown (brooch), 1996
sterling
3 x 3"
Photograph by Doug Yaple

GENDERED MEMORIES: ADORNMENT UNCONTAINED

CARDINAL STRITCH UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN
MARCH 3 – 22, 1998

text by KRISTEN FOGTMAN-FAUST

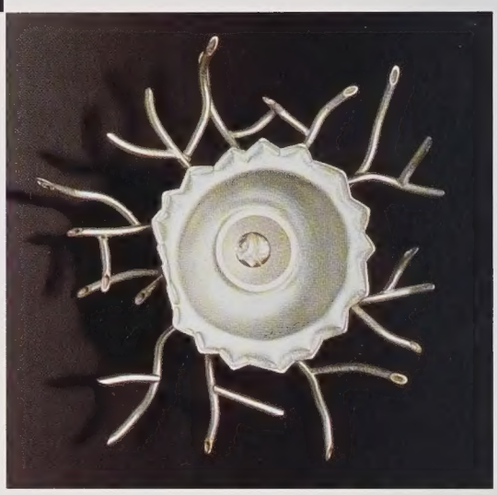
Cardinal Stritch University Art Gallery presented the works of prominent metalsmiths Barbara Stutman, Keith Lewis, Beverly Penn, Megan Corwin, Marilyn da Silva, and Didi Suydam to address and inform the discourse of embellishment through gendered experience.

In "Gendered Memories: Adornment Uncontained," wearable works ranged from the controversial narratives of Keith Lewis's brooches to the serene beauty of Didi Suydam's emblematic pendants. The inclusion of Marilyn da Silva's meticulously layered allegories and Beverly Penn's wall sculptural pieces contributed to the expanding vocabulary of contemporary adornment and metalwork. The selected artists embody to varying degrees what Curator Michal Ann Carley has termed "gendered memories." The use of the word "memories" conjures feelings of intimacy and involvement and invites examination of the artists' personal experiences. In communicating issues indicative of a specific gender, the artists enlist a heightened sense of the personal or private in their works.

Keith Lewis's commemorative portraits convey the personal depth of human vulnerability through a combination of perverse oddity and empathy. Lewis's brooches are the most engrossing example of gendered memory found in this exhibit. The animal/human amalgamation Lewis creates for *Bath Time* is incessantly emotive and endearing. *Well Doug, It's 36 Now* encapsulates Lewis's ability to couple elements of repugnance and beauty. Viewing these works in person allows a full appreciation of the passion and superior craftsmanship of this maker. While Lewis's creatures expose human imperfection, they challenge the idealistic confines of traditional adornment.

Didi Suydam, Megan Corwin, and Barbara Stutman, in a distinctly female discourse, elaborate on contemporary body embellishment. Suydam's *Bell Flower, Seed, Young Shoot, Opening Blossom,* and *Pollen Bell* pendants address her recent experiences with fertility and motherhood. The wearable forms reference traditional neckpieces while slight exaggerations of size and proportion add conceptual strength. Megan Corwin's brooches, *Crown* and *Epidural,* depict, with raw energy, the sensually overwhelming experience of childbirth. The verity of the physical experience evident in these pieces is lacking in Corwin's pregnancy vessels, *Direct Hit, First Trimester,* and *Second Trimester*. By employing less conventional jewelry design and technique, Barbara Stutman further represents feminine issues. Stutman's knitted and crocheted forms serve as appropriate vehicles for her social commentaries. The *On Being Female* brooch series celebrates femininity by using these common handwork processes so often associated with women. Stutman's work becomes increasingly overt with *How to Gift Wrap a Cellulite Complex* and *How to Display the Catch of the Day*. The peculiar wearability of these neckpieces boldly confronts unwelcome societal pressures.

Beverly Penn's *Testament* exemplifies a more distantly analytical approach, without sacrificing the work's underlying sensitivity. The nine plates of layered beeswax exquisitely envelop graphite images of natural growth and human endeavor. Penn examines the intrinsic discord between these forces and attempts to posit compromise. She continues to juxtapose the human and nature in *To the Victor Goes the Spoils*. She convincingly reproduces, in copper, branches that incorporate human-made regularity and order to create the contouring lines of a large



trophy form. Although these pieces draw from personal and historical resources they imply a less apparent gendered focus.

The layout and display of exceptional examples of both intimate and detached gendered experiences enhance the exhibit's adornment dialog. The prevailing strength of Beverly Penn's striking aesthetic directed the ordered space. The disseminated placement of Penn's work segued to the more personal encounters with the other objects. M

Kristen Fogtman-Faust is a metalsmith who resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

opposite page top
Diane Falkenhagen
House and Garden, 1997
sterling, copper, prismacolor pencil
2 1/8 x 1 3/4 x 1 3/4"

opposite page right
Claire Sandford
Bead, 1997
patinated copper, silver, gold leaf
3 x 3 x 3/8"

THE ENVIRONMENTAL BEAD

LYNN TENDER BIGNELL GALLERY AT THE BROOKFIELD CRAFT CENTER
BROOKFIELD, CONNECTICUT
JULY 20 - SEPTEMBER 7, 1997

text by **JOHN COGSWELL**

Ah, those ageless, ubiquitous beads: as old as time, as common as sand, and as popular as cold drinks on a hot day. Possibly the oldest, and surely, by sheer volume, the most numerous family of jewelry forms, as a group, they are, generally, rather featureless and nondescript, their sole, uniquely defining characteristic, a hole. Like pubescent adolescents at a mall, they are most often found hanging around with others of their own size and kind, anonymous participants in each trendy new fashion fad, dependent on some other external means of support.

Found in every culture, in all times, in all materials, beads are the very picture of success. Yet, alas, they are, perhaps, to some degree, victims of that very success. Prolific commercial production, moderate cost, and common availability have bred apathy and indifference. The humblest of adornments, beads are more often relegated by the wearer to a supporting role as fashion accent or accessory rather than as bold, individualistic statements like other distant relatives within the jewelry family. Beads are often worn, but equally as often overlooked; right in front of our eyes, but virtually unseen. Likewise, within our own metals community, beads maintain a second-rate status. The bead has never realized popular adoption as a vehicle of artistic expression on any great scale. Usually of rather diminutive scale, beads have been generally ignored, providing too little, and too restrictive, a surface with which to work. Well designed, thought-provoking, one-of a kind beads reflecting/addressing serious artistic, aesthetic concerns are rare. Rarer still is a collection, by many different makers, of such beads - until *The EnvironMental Bead*, that is.

This two-year traveling collection of one-of-a-kind beads, developed by Gallery Director Judith T. Russell and curated/produced by artist, beadmaker, and teacher Marjorie Simon, represents the creative efforts of twenty-four well-known contemporary metalsmiths. Presented with the challenge of creating one or more beads reflecting a personal response to their physical or metaphysical environment, these artists were encouraged to explore the concept of bead as introspective statement.

The best and most powerful work, in any media, is also invariably the most personal and expressive. When that work represents the melding of the heart, the mind, the sensibilities, and the hands of the maker, as do the best pieces in this exhibition, can it help but strike a responsive chord in the beholder? And there is a rich banquet of diverse and meaningful offerings here, something for everyone.

The use of subtle humor is one of several recurrent thematic devices employed here. A number of participants have chosen the discards and debris of everyday life, manipulated with a wry spin, from which to fashion their statements. Bobby Hansson's whimsical fabrication of aerosol can tops, Harriete Estel Berman's worry beads skillfully crafted from discarded food and beverage containers, Judith Hoyt's assemblage of rusted bottle caps and found objects, Shari Mendelson's clustering of precious glittering crystal beads to create her own and Boris Bally's clever use of multi-layered rubber bands in a new and unexpected context elicit a double take and a chuckle, all the while challenging ingrained attitudes and values.

Several artists give us pause to reflect on the promise of hidden beauty to be found in the common and mundane. The deft and perceptive employ of nominally non-precious materials to model objects of subtlety, value, and beauty is sensitively demonstrated in Tim McCreight's understated paper, plaster and pigment beads and Robert Dancik's creation of papier mâché and epoxy resin.

The juxtaposition of precious and non-precious is well illustrated by Sharon Church's pendant bead of carved antler and diamonds, Pat Flynn's simple but striking combination of stainless steel, silver and gold, and the lush contrast of charcoal-grey slate and diamonds in Donald Friedlich's untitled entry. Still others chose a somewhat more classical jeweler's approach to the bead, as in Micki Lippe's oxidized silver and gold openwork orb, Jan Yager's elegant, oxidized silver, gold and pearl *Sidewalk Necklace: City Flora, City Flotsam*, and James Meyer's neckpiece of gold, silver, and slate. Susan Sloan's baby beads and precious metals *Zygote* neckpiece and Diane Falkenhagen's silver and copper *House and Garden* bead, embellished with colored pencils, make more personally poignant, introspective statements.

The EnvironMental Bead is small in size (the show's specific thematic assignment elicited a total of just over two dozen pieces), but remarkably cohesive despite the diversity of the makers and their solutions to the conceptual challenge. The installation, simple, unobtrusive, and

elegant, designed by exhibition participants Robert Dancik and Robert Ebendorf, created a perfect environment for the presentation of the work, providing a visual uniformity to the presentation and reinforcing the focus of the exhibition. This is a quality production; the initial vision, the eclectic selection of work, and the careful planning and preparation all come together here. It works. ■

John Cogswell is a jeweler/silversmith/educator who lives in Plattekill, New York.

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September 26 - October 24, 1997

Objects of Desire Gallery; Louisville, Kentucky
March 1-31, 1998

Phenomenon Gallery; Richmond, Virginia
April 10 - May 23, 1998

Artables Gallery; Houston, Texas
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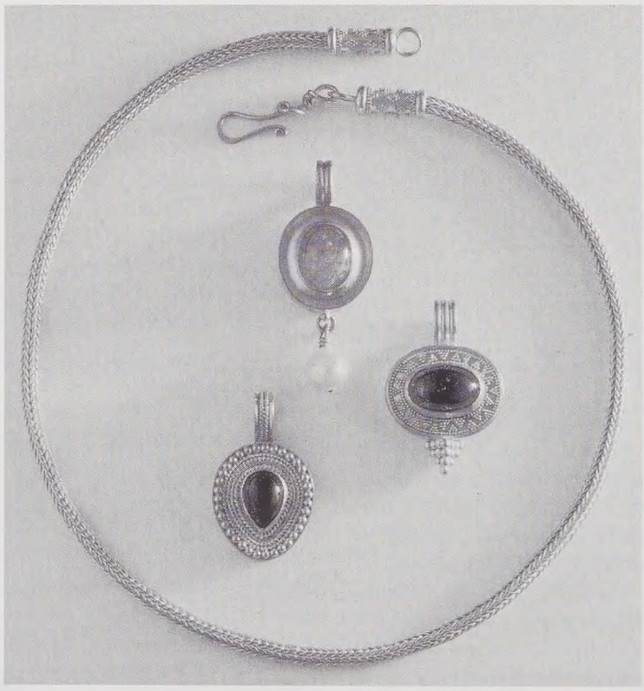

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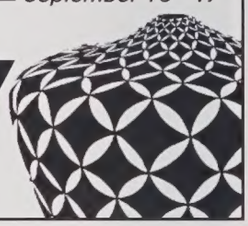

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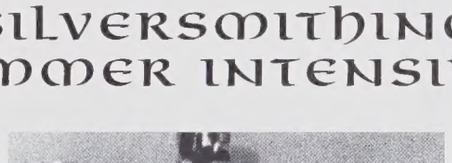

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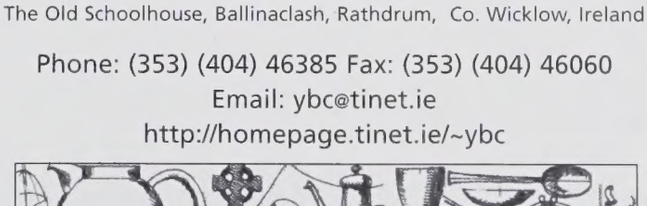

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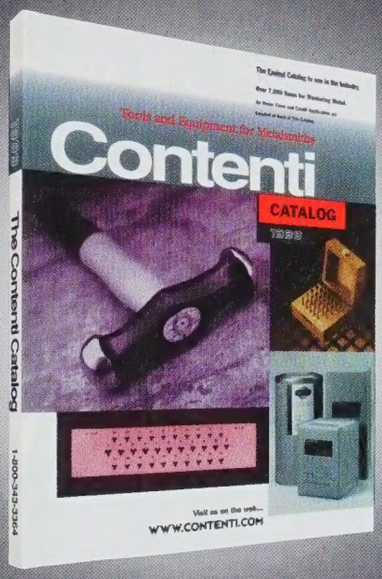

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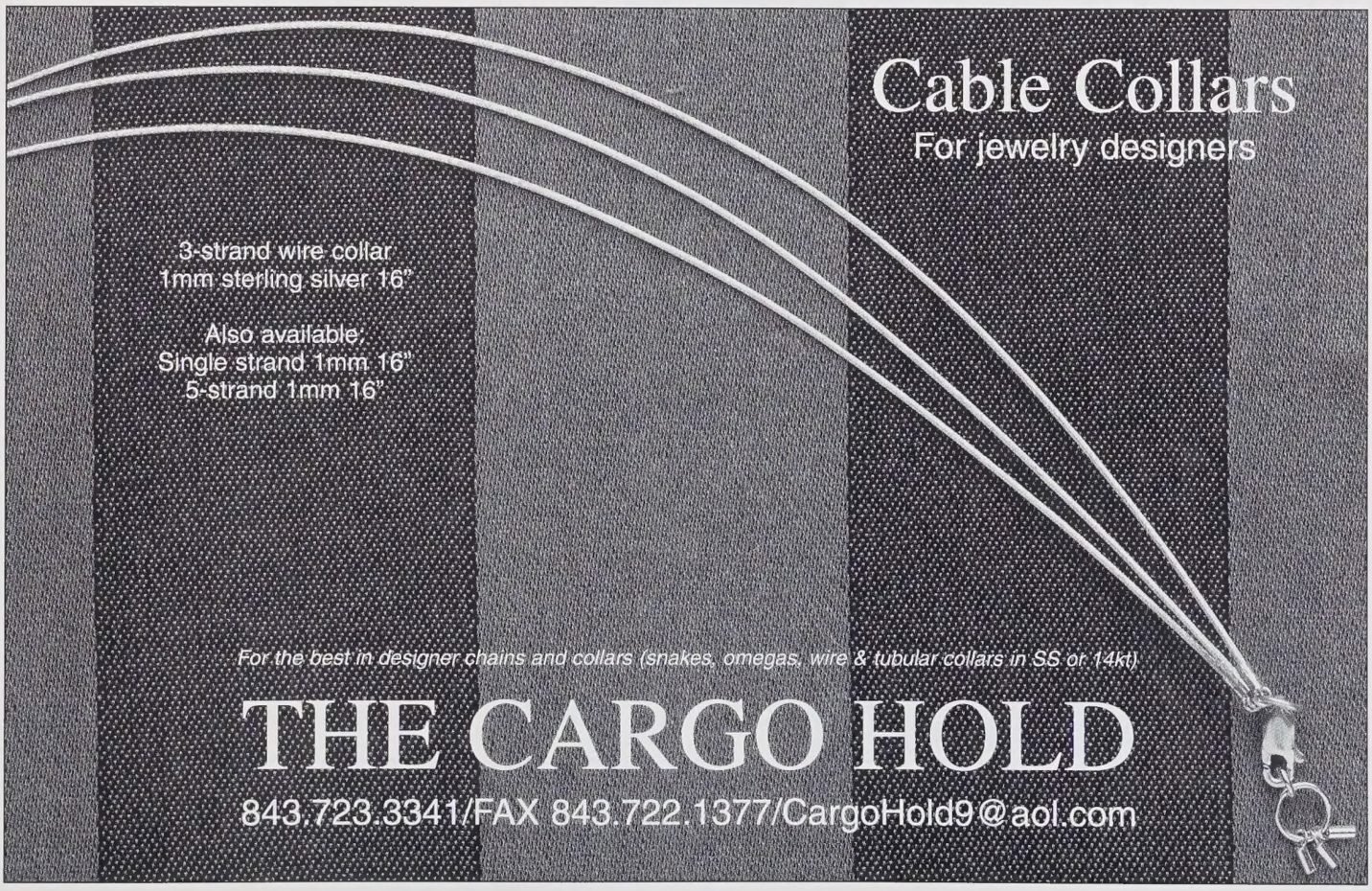
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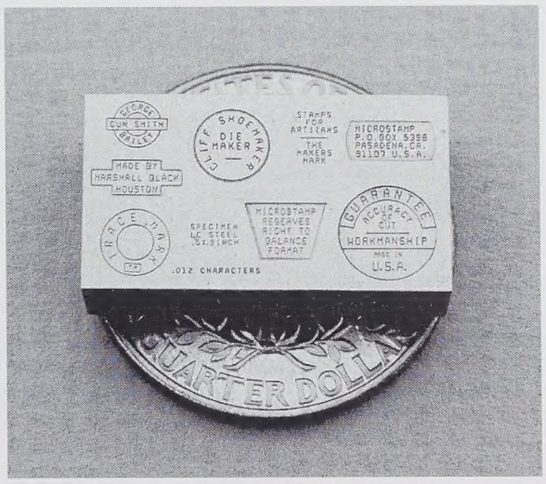
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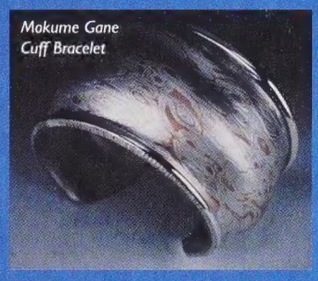

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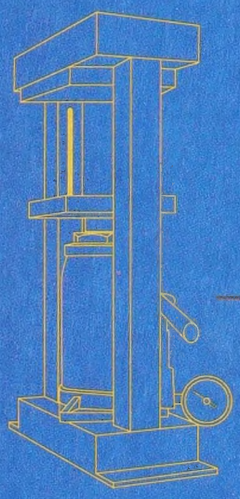

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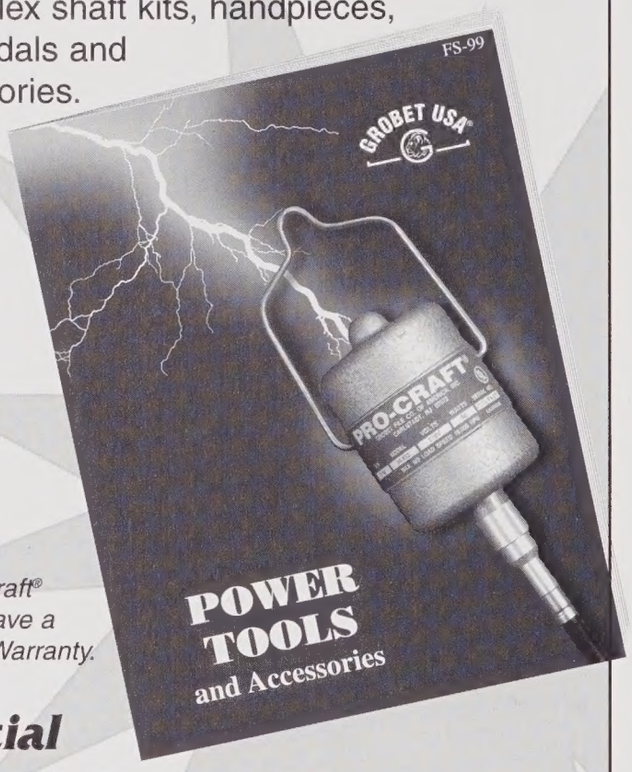

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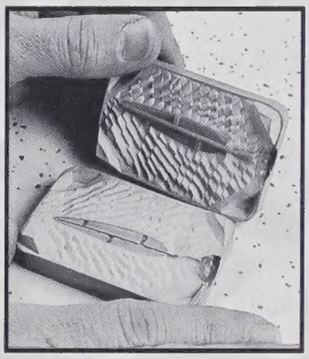

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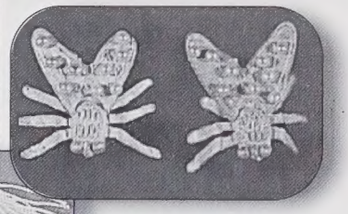

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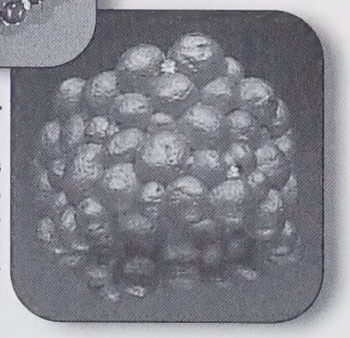

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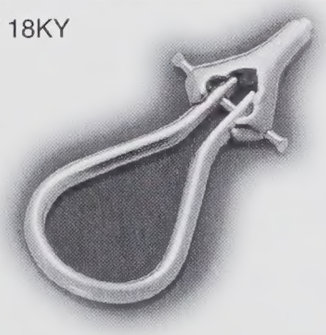

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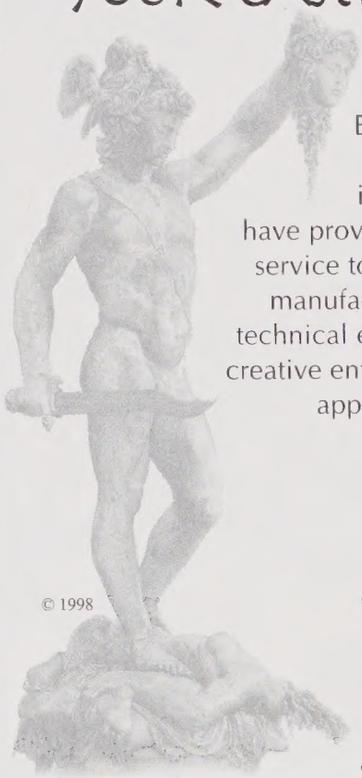

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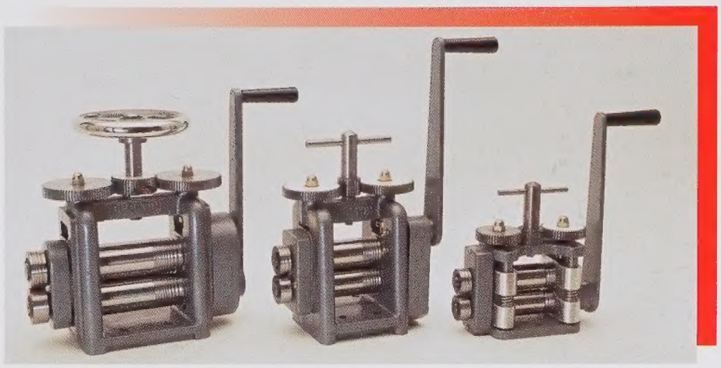

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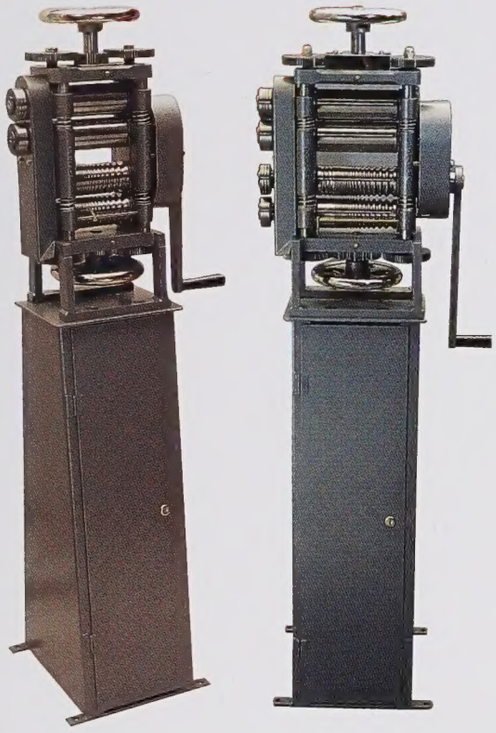

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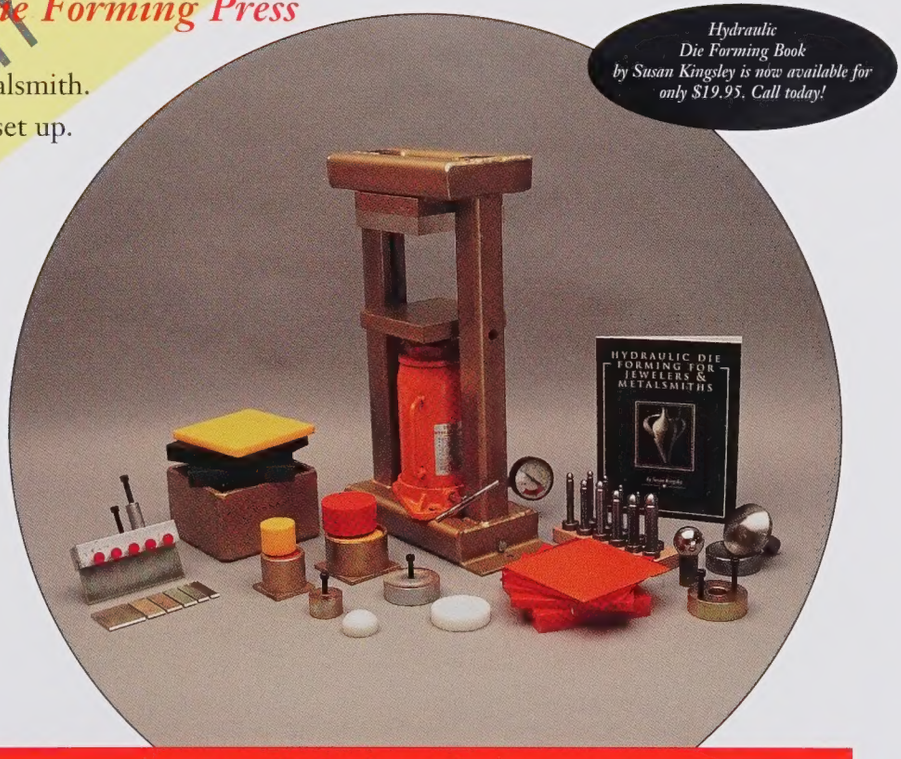

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